COMIC BOOKS

COMICS FEATURE™

NUMBER 48
OCTOBER 1986
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THEY COULDN'T GET IT RIGHT
DELL'S SUPERHEROES

A GOLDEN AGE GREAT
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DC TO COMIC FANS: DROP DEAD

Well, they've finally gone and done it. Just when it seemed that DC Comics might be able to enjoy a bit of success after a long dry period, they've decided that they don't like being number two in the hearts of comic fandom—they would prefer to be number ninety!

DC Comics has let the temporary publicity barrage that they have gained from such diverse sources as **Gentlemen's Quarterly**, **Rolling Stone** and the *Today Show* go straight to their heads! They no longer care what the fan press, or presumably, fandom as a whole thinks about them.

Acting on the urging of a number of letter writers—see, I told you that I pay attention to what you write to say!—I contacted DC Comics to try to arrange coverage of the many changes in their oldest characters. And I got the biggest run-around that anyone has ever been the victim of. I talked to Peggy May—after getting nothing but her answering machine for weeks, and this at her office number—and she told me that the DC creative people simply didn't have the time to talk to us. Peggy, of course, is the head honcho for "publicity" over at DC. To try to break through the barrier, I contacted Dick Giordano, their esteemed Executive Editor, and he promised me that he would see what he could do and that either he or Peggy May would **definitely** call me on the next business day. After failing to receive a response for one week of leaving messages—"We're sorry, Mr. Giordano isn't in his office"..."I am afraid that Mr. Giordano is in conference"..."Mr. Giordano says he will call you as soon as he is off the other line"—I tried to talk to Peggy again. This time she took my call, and told me that Dick had never talked to her! What's more, she emphatically reiterated her position that no one had the time to talk to us. When I informed her that both Steve Englehart and Frank Miller had already agreed to speak with us when we contacted them, she stated that she didn't feel that anyone who couldn't meet their deadlines had the time to talk to anyone. When we pointed out that a piece on John Byrne was slated for publication in **Amazing Heroes**, she stated that it was unauthorized and that DC would no longer even be sending press releases to that magazine. When I told her that it was impossible to do a major piece based on press releases, she inquired rather pointedly whether we would prefer that she stop sending them! (Naturally I told her that we would appreciate it if they would keep them coming.)

I couldn't believe that this was happening. Certainly DC wouldn't forget about fandom and the fan press just because, for a brief period of time, they had aroused the temporary interest of more general publications. But it seemed to be happening! So I called Kim Thompson of **Amazing Heroes** to find out his side of the story. Kim made it very clear that Peggy had informed him that she was not happy with their running the Byrne article and that he had not received any press releases from DC for over one month. He had attributed that to the ineptness of the DC staff but didn't seem at all surprised to learn that he was no longer on the publicity list. He suggested that **The Comics Interview** was suffering from similar obstruction by DC.

So I called Dave Kraft, who besides being a comic book writer is also the publisher of that publication. Dave told me that he never received any cooperation from DC Comics. He requested that I specifically point out that Peggy May has never been of any assistance and in fact

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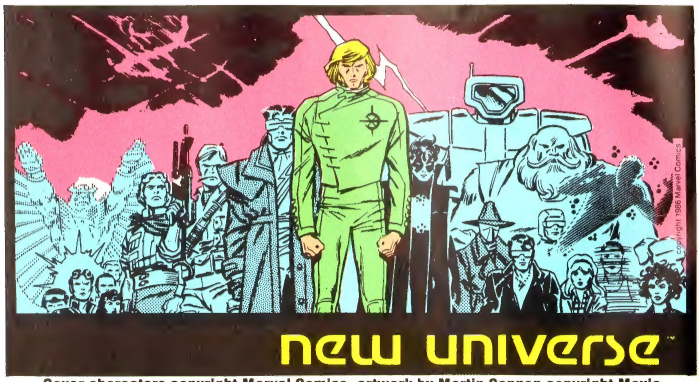

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ANIMATED ANTICS
Saturday mornings Super Powers team of Galactic Guardians is some of the best comic book inspired animation to appear in years!
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FUN & PROFIT
Just how do you spot the hot comics? Looking at the big winners of last year helps to suggest guidelines for the next crop of winners explains Mike Benton. He also lets us know what is fair to do in restoring comics and what crosses the boundary into the realm of fraud. His warning: Beware!
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STRIP SEARCH
Flash Gordon is one of the most popular comic strips of all time and a sterling case history of sci fi funnies. Ron Goulart, with a popular cosmic strip of his own, looks at Alex Raymond's masterpiece.
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Filling in for Roy Thomas, Ron Goulart takes a look at yet another of the Novelty comic books, this one featuring Blue Bolt, Dick Cole and a few other less memorable creations.
44

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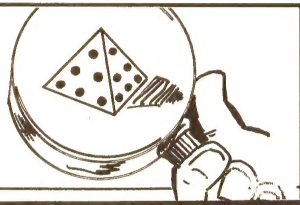
Virtually every publisher of comic books tries their hand at superheroes at one time or another. Dell Comics created some of the best funny animal and western comics of all time but when they turned their attention to the caped and cowled crusaders they learned all the wrong lessons according to Will Murray.
50



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FEATURES

MARVEL'S NEW UNIVERSE

A GUIDED TOUR

25 years ago, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, along with several other capable talents, laid the foundation for the Marvel Universe. From these early creations such as the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, Thor, the Avengers and others emerged a complete cosmos populated by alien races, myriad worlds and loads of exciting adventures. Now, Editor-In-Chief Jim Shooter thinks that it is time that they tried their hand at it again. Now they are creating the New Universe. Whether the new characters will be as popular as the old will only become clear over the course of time, but James Van Hise talked to the editors and writers to learn the complete details to each of the new books. Colorful, but hopefully more realistic, adventurers with such names as Kickers, Inc., Merc and Justice are completely explained. Be sure to read this feature before you explore the comic book racks!

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AN EXCITING COMICS FEATURE EXCLUSIVE

A FREE ROLEPLAYING GAME

Steve Perrin, our regular gaming columnist and the creator of such popular games as **Runequest, Superworld** and **Elfquest,** along with loads of supplementary modules and other items, has crafted a simple game for beginning roleplayers. And **COMICS FEATURE** is happy to be able to present it as a free pullout bonus to all of its readers!

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FEATURE NEWS

NEW DAREDEVIL CREATIVE TEAM NAMED

Daredevil 236, written by Ann Nocenti and illustrated by Barry Windsor-Smith, gives an indication of directions the title will be taking. Originally written as a fill-in issue to build up to Steve Englehart's take over of the title, Englehart will script only issue 237 whereupon Nocenti will become the regular writer for the title.

As reported in **CF** two issues ago, Englehart quit the book when he learned that he had not been told of an already written Daredevil story which invalidated areas he had explored in a just completed script. Seeing it as an indication of an atmosphere where poor communication reigned, Englehart chose to opt out of the series.

Nocenti will begin her regular stint with issue 238, drawn by Sal Buscema, which is a "Mutant Massacre" tie-in wherein Sabretooth decides to take on Daredevil while he's waiting for orders to attack the X-Men.

Daredevil 239 will feature the new regular artist team of penciller Louis Williams and inker Al Williamson.

Nocenti will continue the Hell's Kitchen storyline introduced by Frank Miller. Karen Page will remain in the series and The Black Widow will soon return to the series, along with some of The Man Without Fear's most famous villains.

The two-part Daredevil story written by Miller and slated to be drawn by Walt Simonson is still in the works and will most likely be released in a **Dark Knight** type of format. A publication date has not been announced.

THE RETURN OF THE QUESTION!

On the heels of DC's successful revival of the old Charlton hero **The Blue Beetle** comes **The Question**. The character most recently appeared teamed with The Blue Beetle in issues 5, 6 and 7 of that title.

The Question will be written by Denny O'Neil and drawn by Ernie Colon. The first issue will be published in September.

O'Neil is enjoying writing the book because he prefers human scale characters (The Question has no superpowers).

O'Neil is taking a less standard approach to the writing in comparison with Len Wein's style of writing **Blue Beetle**. In an interview with **The Comic Buyer's Guide**, O'Neil reveals the direction he wants to go with the book.

"The fact that **Watchmen** and **Dark Knight** have found such wide acceptance means we can deal with more mature plots and themes in a more mature way. I feel more liberation is at work in the field than at any other time in the last 15 years."

The Question is a journalist who uses his alter ego to investigate stories and fight crime.

DEMON WITH A GLASS HAND

The classic **Outer Limits** teleplay by Harlan Ellison for the episode "Demon With A Glass Hand" has been adapted by DC into their graphic novel format. Illustrated by Marshall Rogers from the story by Harlan Ellison, it will be on sale in September.

RECENT GOSSIP

What famed French fantasy and western author will soon appear under the Marvel banner? Word has it that Marvel will soon release a series of graphic novels showcasing the total fantasy/sci fi work of the Gaulic great.

Marvel has yet another Avengers book in the works. It seems that they feel that three's the charm. The new title, to be published alongside **The Avengers** and **The West Coast Avengers** will be formated much like the old double-header **Strange Tales, Tales of Suspense, Tales to Astonish** and the like. The front story will always feature a tale of Hawkeye while the other strip will rotate. At least one story of Tigra is planned.

This one is more than a rumor. Cadence Corp., the parent company of Marvel Comics and various other enterprises, has just sold off their distribution arm. Curtis Circulation, headed up by Joe Walsh, is now the property of France's Hechet. This is the first time that Marvel Comics will not—in effect—distribute themselves in well over a decade, back when Independent, now Warner Publishers Services, had the honor. Curtis also distributes the Gladstone line of Disney-licensed characters.

STRIKEFORCE: MORITURI

DOOMED HEROES!

Heroes willing to pay the ultimate price for their power is the theme of **Strikeforce: Morituri**, a new monthly series from Marvel. Written by Peter Gillis, pencilled by Brent Anderson and inked by Scott Williams, the series is unconnected to either the regular Marvel Universe or the new Universe comics, much as Marvel's Epic Comics are.

Strikeforce: Morituri deals with a group of people who accept the death sentence of super powers in order to give Earth its only chance of surviving an alien invasion by the fierce beings known as *The Horde*.

When the first issue opens, the original team ("The Black Watch") are already dead. We are then introduced to the next group in Strikeforce: Morituri—

Vyking: The group's leader, he can unerringly locate other members of the team and has the power to re-route energies though his body.

Blackthorn: By her touch she can break down the molecular structure of any object, creating a weak point allowing it to be destroyed.

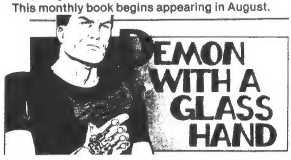
Marathon: The largest and strongest member, the longer he uses his power, the more it increases.

Radian: He can emit a blinding form of radiation.

Adept: She can analyze and counteract the effects of any substance she comes in contact with.

Snapdragon: She can hurl plasma bursts.

This monthly book begins appearing in August.



LETTERS

Send all comments and correspondence to:
COMICS FEATURE
8399 Topanga Canyon Blvd.
Suite 210
Canoga Park, CA 91304

Dear Happy Hal,

I started reading this magazine at issue 42 and have enjoyed myself on the way. The features on Alpha Flight and The Dark Knight and Daredevil were excellent, thank you.

By the way, how about a feature on the new Superman?

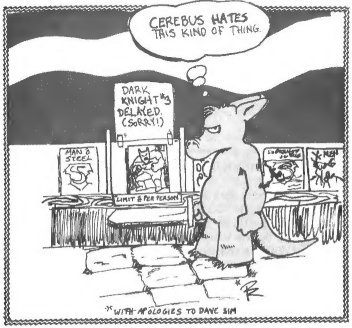
Gary Jones
Woodton Lodge
Woodton
Bungay
Suffolk
England

Next issue we'll be running a feature piece on the new directions of John Byrne's Superman and Frank Miller's Batman. How's that for service?—Helpful Hal

Dear Hal,

This letter is in response to the many letters that I have read lately in this column about the dominance of articles concerning Marvel characters over those of DC and others.

Let me start by saying that yes, I agree that **Comics Feature** does appear to highlight the Marvel characters more. However, let us face the facts: 1) Marvel is the No. 1 comics publisher; 2) Marvel appears to be more innovative with their characters and presents them in a more realistic world (DC is trying the Marvel style with Firestorm but most of the characters are just not believeable, we need characters that we can truly identify with!); 3) Finally, DC has allowed many of their characters to become stale and worn out. Flash died a long time ago, and Superman has not been interesting for years as well. Obviously, DC sees that The Man of Steel has become old, since John Byrne has been brought in to spice the title up to what it should be. Your fine magazine covers the new and the newsworthy, which is the way it should be, I would be upset if you didn't cover Byrne's approach to Superman, but it appears that you will be so there should be no problem.



Let me also say that yes, I am a Marvel fan, the first comics that I ever read back in the early 1960s were Marvels, however, I feel that I am first and foremost a *Comics Fan* and that I look for a good story and artwork before I think about who the Publisher is. I purchase 40 titles per month, many of them Marvels, but also some DC and Eclipse. DC has improved in my eyes with respect to the improvements in some of their older characters. Hawkman has become a very good book through the Shadow War Mini-Series (*Yes it has, and I wish the best of luck to Richard Howell and Tony Isabella on this)* and if the monthly book is just ½ as good it still will be excellent quality. The Deadman mini-series was excellent, as was the Sword of the Atom series but my favorite mini-series was the Green Arrow. These mini-series are all classic representations of what a comic book should be; entertaining with good story and artwork, and the reader can sense that the people involved really care about the product that they are putting out. The trick that DC must learn is to give the reader consistent quality and stories that make people think.

In closing, I would like to make a few final remarks and requests.

1) I hope you will do an article on the new Hawkman series, let us know where it's going, and maybe do a character history like you did for the Green Lantern.
2) Mike Benton's Fun & Profit is a great article, keep it up! Both young and old collectors will really *profit* from it.
3) The Golden Age of Comics is going to be an interesting series, but let's hear about the horror comics as well, and the **Seduction of the Innocent** trials.

That's all for now, keep up the good work!

S. Szpak
18 Mall Road
Hamilton, Ontario

S, As you no doubt know by now, our coverage of DC will be greatly curtailed by their policy towards all of the fan press. It is much harder to cover a company that actively resists coverage! We certainly plan to keep Mike around as long as the chains on him hold. Roy Thomas' Golden Age should be fascinating indeed as he has had more to do with the revivals of the older characters than just about anyone in comic books. While it is unfortunate that he missed this issue, we can certainly understand his deadline needs on the books which he writes. Plus Ron Goulart is a very fine

substitute! Next issue we will be skipping the normal Silver Age column so that we can begin our sporadic series on EC Comics. We begin with the sci fi line and cover the books in very great depth. In fact we'll be devoting each installment to only one book each time—the frequency of this depends on reader response as each time it will involve dropping some column for that issue. Initially we plan to do this about quarterly. Let us know what you think. I apologize that this letters page is truncated by my running over my alloted space for my howlings, but I do feel that what I address is an important issue to all comic book readers. One last note: Do let me know what you think of the editorial cartoons that we have begun to run. They are by Ruth Kennedy, one of the two art directors on **COMICS FEATURE**, *and I have been enjoying them immensely.—Happy Hal.*

CONTINUED FROM INSIDE FRONT COVER

has deliberately acted to try to prevent his coverage of DC Comics by requesting that creators not agree to interviews.

It was unanimous! Every single major magazine about the comic book field has been cut off from any coverage of DC Comics to the extent that the DC "publicity" department can enforce their ban. The message to comic book fans is clear. They do not want us writing, or you reading, about them. They do not want any publication primarily devoted to comic books to feature any material about the second largest publisher of comic books in the country!

A number of writers and artists working on DC comic books have pointedly told all three magazines that they do not like the way that the company is treating the matter. They feel that the policy is both wrong in principle and costing them money and good will. Comic book creators rely on sales to put food on the table since a bonus is paid based on the number of copies sold. The more publicity they receive, the higher the sales and therefore the higher the bonuses. Less coverage means less sales. And the people most likely to buy comic books are the people who read the fan press.

I feel that every reader of comic books should know the position that DC Comics is taking. The action on their part does not only effect the publishers of the fan press and the writers and artists of comic books but also every fan who wants to learn more about the work of their favorite creators. Publications such as **Gentlemen's Quarterly** and **The National Enquirer** simply do not have the expertise to ask the right questions when they interview creators about the comic books on which they labor. The fan press does.

The news blackout that DC has imposed on their creative talent is a slap in the face of every comic book fan Please understand where the blame lies, with DC Comics corporate management. With their "publicity" department—Peggy May—and with their Executive Editor—Dick Giordano, but not with the many talented writers and artists that create their books, such as Frank Miller and John Byrne. These gentlemen have always been willing to spend their valuable time with their fans at conventions and by being interviewed for publication. They do not feel that they are too *important* to be bothered by the people who buy their books.

In fact, the very next issue of **COMICS FEATURE** features a special piece on the new directions for Batman and Superman. Frank Miller devoted part of a busy afternoon just so that Contributing Editor James Van Hise and Art Director Jim Keegan could chat with him. There is also material on John Byrne's Superman although, unfortunately, due to DC's deliberate obstruction, no direct interview was possible with him. Despite the efforts of DC Comics, you will enjoy this unique feature on the new directions for Superman and Batman.

Oh, by the way, just so you won't be confused, you should notice that the cover date of this issue is pushed ahead by one month. You did not miss an issue in between this one and the last, which cover-featured X-Factor and Thor. The reasons for the change in date are too technical and *boring* to go into here, but all future issues will begin dating one month forward from the date on this month's cover. Ok? Confused enough? Maybe I shouldn't have tried to explain the whole mess after all!

—Happy Hal

Comics Consumer Guide

DC

8/5/86 SHIPPING

☐**FIRESTORM 54 —**
(Conway/Brozowski/Mitchell) Introducing Lava.

☐**THE OUTSIDERS 14 —**
(Barr/P-I-C by Aparo). Direct sales only

☐**SON OF AMBUSH BUG 6 —**
(Giffen/Fleming/Oskner)

8/12/86 Shipping

☐**ANGEL LOVE 5 —**
(Of 8) (Barbara Slate).

☐**GREEN LANTERN CORPS ANNUAL 2 —**
(Moore/P-I by O'Neill) Double-sized anthology issue featuring stories by Moore, O'Neill, Kupperberg, Von Eeden, Englehart, Staton and more.

☐**HEX 16**
(Fleisher/Giffen/Garzon)

☐**TALES OF THE TEEN TITANS 72 —**
(Wolfman/Barreto/Tanghal) Originally presented in NTT 13.

☐***VIGILANTE 36 —**
(Kupperberg/Cowan/Magyar) The Peacemaker returns. Mike Grell provides the cover art. Direct sales only.

☐***WATCHMEN 4 —**
(Moore/P-I by Gibbons) The origin of Dr. Manhattan. Direct sales only.

8/19/86 Shipping

☐**BATMAN 402 —**
(Max Alan Collins/P-I by Jim Starlin)

☐**BLUE BEETLE 7 —**
(Wein/Cullins/Patterson)

☐**ELECTRIC WARRIOR 8 —**
(Moench/P-I-C by Baikie)

☐**ELVIRA'S HOUSE OF MYSTERY 10 —**

☐***LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES 29**
(MASK insert)
(Levitz/LaRocque/DeCarlo/Lightle) Direct sales only.

☐**MAN OF STEEL 5 —**
(W-P by Byrne/Giordano) Lex Luthor commissions a monster to destroy the Man of Steel. Call it: Bizarro!

☐**'MAZING MAN 12 —**
(Last issue) (Rozakis/DeStefano/F. Miller/Kesel)

☐**SECRET ORIGINS 9 —**
(Thomas/Grindberg/Tuska/Acerno/Smith) Once he was the Star-Spangled Kid. Learn why he is Skyman. Plus the original speedster himself...The Flash.

☐**STAR TREK 33 —**
(Wein/Sutton/Villagran/Brozowski)

8/26/86 Shipping

☐**ADVENTURES OF THE OUTSIDERS 40 —**
(Barr/P-I by Aparo/Lightle) Originally presented in Outsiders 2.

☐**BLUE DEVIL 31 —**
(Last issue — 48 pages) (Mishkin & Cohn/Cowan & Sienkiewicz)

☐**BOOSTER GOLD 11**
(W-P by Jurgens/DeCarlo)

☐**GREEN LANTERN CORPS. 207 —**
(LEGENDS crossover)
(Englehart/Staton/Farmer/Patterson)

☐**INFINITY, INC. 33 —**
(R&D Thomas/McFarlane & Harris/DeZuniga) The origin of Obsidian — Master of Shadows. Direct sales only.

☐**SGT. Rock 413 —**
(Kanigher/P-I by Andy Kubert/Joe Kubert)

☐**SUPER POWERS 4 —**
(Kupperberg/Infantino/I-C by Marcos) Janus leads the Super Powers team into the battle for Apokolips.

☐**SWAMP THING 55 —**
(Moore/Veitch/Alcala/Bissette) Swamp Thing begins an odyssey through the cosmos.

☐**THE NEW TEEN TITANS 24 —**
(Wolfman/Barreto/Tanghal) The search for Nightwing and Raven begins — as the Titans go against the Church of Brother Blood. Direct sales only.

☐**WARLORD 112 —**
(Fleisher/P-I by Randall/Grindberg)

☐**WHO'S WHO 22 —**

9/2/86 Shipping

☐**ALL-STAR SQUADRON 64 —**
(Thomas/Boring/Gustovich/Grindberg)

☐**COSMIC BOY 1 —**
(Levitz/Giffen/Colon) The beginning of a quest that leads from LEGENDS to LEGION to the new SUPERMAN.

☐**DEMON WITH A GLASS HAND 5 —**
(SF Graphic Novel) (Ellison/Rogers)

☐**DETECTIVE 569 —**
(Barr/Davis/Neary)

☐**HAWKMAN 5 —**
(Isabella/Howell/Heck) Katar and Shayera defeat one of their deadliest foes — and lose their best friend.

☐**LEGENDS 2 —**
(Ostrander & Wein/Byrne/Kesel) Over Superman's objections, the President bans all super-hero activities. Direct sales only.

☐**MAN OF STEEL 6—**
(Last Issue) (W-P by Byrne/Giordano) Superman returns to the town of his youth, only to discover his true origins.

☐**OUTSIDERS ANNUAL 1 —**
(Barr/P-I-C by Nowlan)

☐**TALES OF THE LEGION 342 —**
(Levitz/LaRocque/Mahlstedt/Lightle) Originally presented on LEGION 17.

☐**TEEN TITANS SPOTLIGHT 5** —
(Wolfman/Andru) Jericho's European adventure concludes.

MARVEL

8/5/86 Shipping

☐**DAKOTA NORTH 4** —
(Thomases/Salmons)

☐**DAREDEVIL 237** —
A new direction with Steve Englehart and Louis Williams.

☐**G.I. JOE SPECIAL MISSIONS 2** —
(Hama/Trimpe/Cover by Zeck/Beatyy) Guest stars Nazis & Israelis with the villainous Cobra.

☐**NEW MUTANTS 46** —
(Claremont/Guice/Baker/Cover by Windsor-Smith) Guest stars: Morlocks and X-Men with Magnus, the villain. Ties in with the Morlock massacre story running through other mutant titles.

☐**NIGHT MASK 2** —
(Goodwin/Salmons/cover by Salmons) Keith (Nightmask) and Teddy cross into a dream on a controlled basis...

☐**PSI FORCE 2** —
(Perry/Texeira/Baker) Their protector slain, Psi-Force must use their collective powers in unison.

☐**STRIEKFORCE: MORITURI 1** —
(Gillis/Anderson/Williams/Cover by Anderson) Morituri — "We who are about to die," a select group of superpowered individuals, each of whom had acquired their powers at dreadful costs.

☐**TRANSFORMER MOVIE 1** —
(Of 3) (Macchio/Perlin/Akin & Garvey)

☐**WEB OF SPIDER-MAN 21** —
(Michellnie/Silvestri) The new villain is Solo. Continuing "Web's" international setting with Peter and Joy in terrorist-stricken Ireland.

☐**WEST COAST AVENGERS 15** —
(Englehart/Milgrom/Sinnott) Guest stars: Daimon Heilstrom & Hellcat.

8/12/86 Shipping

☐**ALPHA FLIGHT 41** —
(Mantlo/Ross/Portacio) Introduction of The Purple Girl, a new character who will become the first member of the new Beta Flight.

☐**AMAZING SPIDER-MAN 283** —
(DeFalco/Frenz/Layton) Guest stars The Avengers, with the villainous Titania, and The Absorbing Man.

☐**CAPTAIN AMERICA 324** —
(Gruenwald/Neary/Beatty) Whirlwind and Trapster plus Nomad.

☐**DR. STRANGE 80** —
(Gillis/Warner/Emberlin/Cover by Warner)

☐**KICKERS, INC 2** —
(DeFalco/Frenz/S. Buscema/Cover by Frenz/Buscema)

☐**LABYRINTH 2** —
(Of 3) (Jacobson/J. Buscema/Tanghal)

☐**MERC 2** —
(David/Morrow) Hazzard attempts to live the life of a normal father by attending his son's baseball game — and becomes the target of assassins.

☐**POWER PACK 27** —
(Simonson/Bogdanove) Cameo appearance by Sabretooth and Wolverine. The villains are the Marauders. Tieing in with, and featuring guest appearances by, X-Men and X-Factor. Part of major storyline involving slaughter of the Morlocks. Direct sales only.

☐**SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN 130** —
(Kraar/Simons/Cover by Jusko)

☐**STAR DIGEST 1** —

☐**AMAZING HIGH ADVENTURE 5** —
Direct sales only.

8/19/86 Shipping

☐**MARVEL AGE 45** —
Direct sales only.

☐**AVENGERS 274** —
(Stern/J. Buscema/Palmer) Second part of storyline involving the new Masters of Evil.

☐**CONAN THE BARBARIAN 189** —
(Owsley/J. Buscema/Chan/Cover by Buscema)

☐**D.P. 7 2** — (Gruenwald/Ryan) The Seven Displaced Paranormals receive their "hero names".

☐**G.I. JOE 54** —
(Hama/Whigham/Mushynsky)

☐**HOWARD THE DUCK 1** —
(Of 3) (Fomgerpt/Baker)

☐**INCREDIBLE HULK 326** —
(Milgrom/Geiger) The debut of Rick Jones as the all-new, all-grey, Incredible Hulk.

☐**JUSTICE 2** —
(Goodwin/Isherwood) The Hounds are present as the search for Justice heats up.

☐**MARVEL TALES 194** —
Reprinting MARVEL TEAM-UP 59.

☐**THE 'NAM 1** —
(Murray/Golden/Gil/Cover by Golden)

☐**X-MEN 212** —
(Claremont/Leonardi/Green) Starring Morlocks and Marauders. Wolverine battles Sabretooth. Ties in with Marauders/Morlocks storyline.

☐**MARVEL SAGA 13** —

☐**TRANSFORMERS UNIVERSE 1**

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☐**FANTASTIC FOUR 297** —
(Stern/J. Buscema/S. Buscema/Cover by Buscema)

☐**IRON MAN 213** —
(Fingeroth/Saltares/Akin & Garvey)

☐**PETER PARKER 121** —
(David/Buckler/McLeod)

Guide

□**SPITFIRE 3 —**
(Brown & Morelli/Trimpe/Sinnott)

□**STAR BRAND 3 —**
(Shooter/Romita, Jr.) A foreign dictator knows that Kenneth Connell possesses the Starbrand, and will do anything to get it.

□**THOR 374 —**
(W. Simson/S. Buscema) The villain is Blockbuster, this issue crosses over with X-MEN, X-FACTOR, POWER PACK storyline. Continuing from 373, Thor rescues Angel. Plus, Thor's arm is broken but, because of Hela's curse, it won't heal.

□**TRANSFORMERS 23 —**
(Budiansky/Perlin/Akin & Garvey/Cover by Trimpe)

□**X-FACTOR 11 —**
Simonson/W. Simonson) Continuing from THOR 374 — a ravaged Angel is returned to X-Factor HQ, which is already crowded with Morlock refugees. ties in with Morlock/Marauders storyline. Note: upcoming changes for Angel will occur as a result of this story.

□**CLASSIC X-Men 4 —**
(Cover by Art Adams) A new 12 page story starring Wolverine and Nightcrawler by Claremont and Bolton. Plus, *Night of the Demon* by Claremont and Cockrum from X-MEN 96, with 5 new pages by Claremont and Cockrum.

□**G.I. JOE UNIVERSE 2 $1.25 —**

□**THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE 13 —**

□**G.I. JOE DIGEST 1 —**

8/5/86 Shipping —

□**MOONSHADOW 10 —**
(Of 12) (DeMatteis/Muth) Direct sales only.

8/12/86 Shipping

□**GROO THE WANDERER 22 —**
(Aragones with Evanier/Cover by Aragones)

8/19/86 Shipping

□**ELEKTRA:ASSASSIN 3 —**
(Of 8) (Miller/Sienkiewicz) S.H.I.E.L.D. has got Elektra, but can they keep her? Direct sales only.

8/26/86 Shipping

□**ALIEN LEGION 16 —**
(Zelenetz/Stroman/Emberlin/Cover by Stroman/Cirocco) Direct Sales only.

□**ELFQUEST 17 —**
(Wendy & Richard Pini)

□**STEELGRIP STARKEY 4 —**
(Of 6) (Weiss/Mayerik/Sherman/Cover by Sherman) Globelock hires Starkey Enterprises to find out who is mining the moon. Direct sales only.

8/5/86 Shipping

□**HUGGA BUNCH 2 —**
(Kay/Kremer/Roettcher)

□**THUNDERCATS 7 —**
(Conway/Delbo)

8/12/86 Shipping

□**ANIMAX 1—**
(W. Simonson/Purcell/Talaoc) Villains are Extinctor and the Mutants.

□**HEATHCLIFF 13 —**
(DeCesare/Kremer/Roettcher/Crover by Kremer)

8/19/86 Shipping

□**SOLARMAN 1 $1.00 —**
(32 pages, no ads) (Stan Lee/Mooney/Janke)

8/26/86 Shipping

□**DROIDS 5 —**
(Caragonne/Romita, Sr/Williamson)

□**POPPLES 1 —**
(Kay/Costanza/Roettcher/Cover by Kremer)

□**TOP DOG 11 —**
(Manak/Kremer/D'Agostino)

COMICO

□**JUSTICE MACHINE 4 —**
(Willingham/Gustovich)

8/22/86 Shipping

□**JONNY QUEST 3 —**
(William Messner—Loebd/Marc Hempel/Mark Wheatley.)

□**MAGE 14 —**
(Matt Wagner/Sam Kieth inks). Also GRENDEL concludes.

□**ELEMENTALS 9 -**
A fun-packed jam issue featuring a tongue-in-cheek look at the high price of "Fame" in the elite world of superheroes! Plotted by (Bill Willingham and Jack Herman/Steve Bissette, Barry Crain, Mike Harris, Mike Mignola, Arnold Paner, Keith Wilson/Rich Rankin and Keith Wilson).

□**ROBOTECH MASTERS 10 —**
(Mike Baron/Neil Vokes/Chris Kalnick)

□**THE ROBOTECH GRAPHIC NOVEL —**
The untold story fo the cataclysmic beginnings. (Carl Macek and Mike Baron/Neil D. Vokes/Ken Steacy).

The following books are direct sales only:

ECLIPSE

8/6/86 Shipping

☐**SCOUT 10** —
(Timothy Truman)

☐**ALIEN ENCOUNTERS 8**

☐**FASHION IN ACTION SUMMER SPECIAL 1**
(John K. Snyder III)

☐**THE NEW WAVE 5** —
(Mindy Newell/Lee Weeks & Ty Templeton).

8/12/86 Shipping

☐**AIRBOY 3** —
(Chuck Dixon/Stan Woch & Willie Blyberg)

☐**ZOONIVERSE 1** —
(Fil Barlow).

8/19/86 Shipping

☐**CROSSFIRE & RAINBOW 3** —
(Mark Evanier/Dan Spiegle)

☐**THE NEW WAVE 6** —
(Mindy Newell/Lee Weeks & Ty Templeton.)

☐**MR. MONSTER'S HIGH-OCTANE HORROR 1**

8/26/86 Shipping

☐**AIRBOY 4** —
(Chuck Dixon/Stan Woch & Willie Blyberg.)

☐**DNAgents 12** —
(Mark Evanier/Mitch Schauer & Willie Blyberg.)

☐**MIRACLEMAN 10** —
(Alan Moore/Chuck Beckum.)

☐**TOR 3-D 2** —
(Joe Kubert.) Reprint.

FANTAGRAPHICS

☐**MIRACLE SQUAD 1**—
(John Wooley/Terry Tidwell & Butch Burcham.)

☐**FLESH & BONES 2** —
(Jan Strnad/Dennis ujitake)

☐**DOOMSDAY SQUAD 5**

FIRST

8/1/86 Shipping

☐**NEXUS 37** —
(Mike Baron/Steve Rude/John Nyberg)

☐**BADGER 18** —
(Mike Baron/Bill Reinhold/Rick Bryant.)

8/8/86 Shipping

☐**GRIMJACK 29** —
(John Ostrander/Shawn McManus/Hilary Barta)

☐**WHISPER 4** —
(Steven Grant/Norm Breyfogle/John Nyberg.)

8/15/86 Shipping

☐**AMERICAN FLAGG 35** —
(Steven Grant/Mark Badger/Randy Emberlin.)

8/22/86 Shipping

☐**ELRIC: Weird of White Wolf 2** —
(Roy Thomas/P. Craig Russell, Michael T. Gilbert/George Freeman)

☐**SHATTER 6** —
(Peter B. Gillis/Steve Erwin/Bob Dienthal)

☐**JON SABLE, FREELANCE 43** —
(Mike Grell.)

QUALITY

☐**JUDGE DREDD 2** —
(John Wagner/Steve (Button) Dillon)

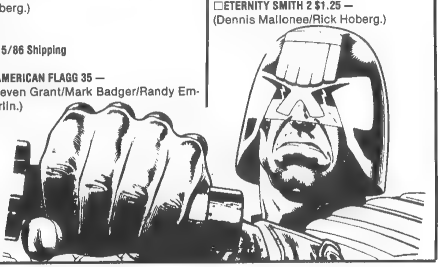
☐**JIM SLADE, ROBO-HUNTER 2** —
(John Wagner and Ian Gibbon)

☐**ROGUE TROOPER 2** —
(Gerry Finley-Day/Colin Wilson)

☐**2000 AD PRESENTS 6** —
Dan Dare by Dave Gibbons, Brian Bolland and Gerry Finley-Day, — Skizz by Alan Moore and Jim Baikie — Harry 20 by Alan Davis and Gerry Finley—Day.

RENEGADE

☐**ETERNITY SMITH 2 $1.25** —
(Dennis Mallonee/Rick Hoberg.)



HEROES

BY JAMES VAN HISE

The Legion of Super-Heroes is a 30th century group of teenagers who use their powers to defend Earth and our galaxy. They numbered among DC comics most popular characters in the 1960s and were a sure bet to attract the attention of young comic book readers. One of those readers was Jim Shooter, who was then 13 years old.Now editor-in-chief of Marvel Comics, his first professional work in comic books was for DC. He began scripting the Legion of Super-Heroes in **Adventure Comics** 346 (July 1966) when he was still 13.The story of how all that came about is an interesting one which demonstrates the differences between the way comics were made 20 years ago and how they operate today.

"My story," Shooter explains, "is that when I was 13, my family needed money and when you're 13 years old, you can't get a job. It occurred to me that the only thing a 13 year old kid could do to make money would be to make something and sell it.

"I'd given up reading comics when I was eight, but had recently come across some of these new-fangled Marvel Comics and found them more interesting. I looked at some of the old **Supermans** that I used to read and I thought that the Marvels were a lot better. I decided that if I studied these and learned to do what Marvel does,I could probably sell it to DC. So I wrote a script and drew it because I had no idea what a comic book script looked like. I tried to make it look as much like a comic book as I could, with crude little balloons, and sent it off to DC Comics. I got a nice, polite letter back saying: Dear Kid, send us another one. So I sent them two more. Then I got a phone call and they offered to buy those three, and for me to work regularly from that point on. They didn't know how old I was.

"So I became a regular writer for DC Comics.As soon as I finished one story, I had another assignment waiting for me — for the next five years. I wrote almost all of the Legion of Super Heroes stories for that period. I also wrote **Superman, World's Finest, Action Comics, Supergirl, Capt. Action** — everything but **Lois Lane.** Eventually, after working at DC for awhile, I got a job offer from Marvel." Today the competition for new talent is much tougher and breaking in requires much more expertise, although Shooter points out that due to his professional origins, he has a special fondness for things which come in the mail.

ENTER: THE KARATE KID

Shooter's first Legion story, "One of Us is a Traitor!", is a two-part tale which introduces several new Legionnaires—Princess Projectra, Ferro Lad, Nemesis Kid and Karate Kid — all created by the young Jim Shooter. When Columbia Pictures made their movie titled **The Karate Kid** in 1984, they had to license their use of the name from DC, due to their ownership of it, even though the film had nothing to do with the Legion. DC owns the trademark on the name Karate Kid, which was created at a time when DC owned everything a writer did for them.

In Shooter's story, The Karate Kid is suspected of being a traitor to the Legion when it becomes clear that someone inside the group is aiding the warmongering leader of another galaxy who is planning to invade Earth. Finally, another of the new members, Nemesis Kid, is revealed to be the traitor.

In issue 348, Shooter introduces the villain Dr. Regulus, whose origin is tied in with the background of SunBoy.

"The Rogue Legionnaire!" in **Adventure** 349 is one of Shooter's best Legion stories as it has an interesting villain in Universo and a storyline which sends 5 Legionnaires into five different time periods.The ending is particularly touching, smacking of the Marvel style of writing which influenced Shooter.

In the two-part adventure in which the Legion battles The Fatal Five (**Adventure** 352 & 353), Shooter kills a Legionnaire in the line of duty — Ferro Lad, one of those which he had introduced in **Adventure** 346.

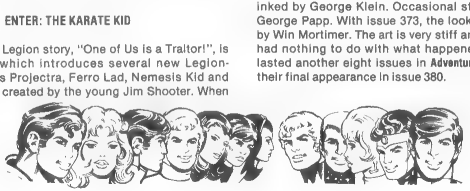
Issue 354 has an odd story, "The Adult Legionairres!" in which superman travels into the future when the Legionnaires are mature adults. One oddity is that they are all still Legionnaires although in other stories membership is limited to teenagers. But then it was never clear *why* membership was so discriminatory to begin with! Although such a story might seem to fall outside the normal continuity, it's actually a sequel to issue 353 as it deals with the effects of Ferro Lad's death.

Shooter once more drew on the death of Ferro Lad for a story in **Adventure** 357, "The Ghost of Ferro Lad!" While the ghost turns out to be a phony, Shooter employs a touching Marvel style twist at the end.

The Fatal Five return in issues 365 & 366 for another massive confrontation.

Shooter wrote most (but not all) of the issues from 346 (July 1966) through 380 (May 1969), which is actually three years rather than the five Shooter recalls.

The artwork during this period was usually Curt Swan inked by George Klein. Occasional stories are drawn by George Papp. With issue 373, the look is altered radically by Win Mortimer. The art is very stiff and while it may have had nothing to do with what happened, the Legion only lasted another eight issues in **Adventure.** Shooter scripted their final appearance in issue 380.



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THE LEGION OF SUPERHEROES (PART II)

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THE LEGION RETURNS

The Legion has been linked to Superboy ever since their original appearance in **Adventure** 247 (April 1958). Even when the Legion series was running in **Adventure**, it was **Superboy** 147 (May-June 1968) which was chosen to feature the untold origin. Written by E. Nelson Bridwell and drawn by Golden Age great Pete Costanza, it tells how Lightning Lad, Cosmic Boy and Saturn Girl were the first three heroes to form the Legion. It also briefly recaps the origin of Lightning Lad to include his brother *and* his sister for the first time (previously the origin recaps included either his brother *or* his sister, but not both. This dangling continuity problem was tied up at last). When the three save a rich man from hired thugs, he suggests that they use their powers to fight crime and form an organization — which he offers to bankroll. Although this is the 30th century, one amusing scene shows the Legion clubhouse being built with a 20th century style construction crane! This new story leads off a series or reprints featuring the Legion, making for a very worthwhile 80 page giant.

In **Superboy** 172, the Legion was renewed, but as a backup feature. It also wasn't yet appearing every issue with new stories, as some were reprints from **Adventure**.

Although still a backup feature, the Legion started to seem like its old self again with **Superboy** 184 when Dave Cockrum and Murphy Anderson took over the art. Scripting was by Cary Bates. Cockrum became solo artist with 191, "Attack of the Sun-Scavenger" as Dr. Regulus returns and we first see the Legion's star cruiser.

With 197, the title changed to **Superboy starring the Legion of Super-Heroes** and Superboy became the backup strip!

Superboy 202 is an interesting study in contrasts. A special 100 page issue, it features two new stories and reprints of Legion classics written by Edmond Hamilton. The reprints are much better as they emphasize plot over action.

With **Superboy** 203 (Aug. 1974), Mike Grell became the new artist while Cary Bates continued as scripter. Titled "Massacre by Remote Control," it features the death of the Invisible Kid, which happens at a convenient time since he has fallen in love with a girl who is revealed to be a ghost!

In June, 1975 (Issue 209), Jim Shooter returned to writing the Legion after a 5 year absence. **Superboy** 210 contains a story in which Shooter tells the origin of Karate Kid, a character he had created nine years before.Since some of Shooter's most interesting villains are the Fatal Five, issue 219 features a return engagement, as well as a full page behind-the-scenes look at the Legion space cruiser.

Paul Levitz took over scripting with **Superboy** 225 (March 1977). Altogether Shooter did handle the Legion for 5 years —they just weren't 5 consecutive years as he recalled.

When Mike Grell left the book, James Sherman took over the art chores and in 228 illustrates "That A World Might Live...A Legionnaire Must Die!" In which Legionnaire Chemical King dies.

Due to deadline problems,**Superboy** 238 is all reprint (of classic Sixties stories from **Adventure**). This is made all the better by a fine new wraparound cover by Jim Starlin. The follow-up issue, **Superboy** 239, is co-plotted by and has layouts by Starlin. Finished art is by Josef Rubinstein — and it's nice work!

James Sherman returned to the strip with much more interesting work under inker Bob McLeod. Some very nice adventures were produced during this period in the late Seventies. But then Joe Staton took over the art and the quality varied depending on who was inking. Issue 245 is inked by Murphy Anderson, one of DC's premier comic book artists.

In issue 246, The Fatal Five return as rulers of a planet to which they have given technological advances and which they now want to sponsor for entry into the United Planets. When the Legion visit the planet they deduce that the people there were given too much, too fast.They plan to oppose entry of the world into the United Planets for fear it would push the civilization of that people right over the edge. The Fatal Five respond by attempting to slay the visiting Legionnaires. Ultimately the people of that world force the Fatal Five to leave.

A lot of the issues feature two stories, such as in **Superboy** 249 which has a solo Chameleon Boy adventure by Kupperberg & Staton.

Issue 250 & 251 are notable because they have story and layouts by Jim Starlin (under the name Steve Apollo) with finished art by Dave Hunt.

ON THEIR OWN

With issue 259, *Superboy* was not only crowded out of his own mag, but off the logo of the book as well. The **Superboy** title was dropped and the book became **The Legion of Super-Heroes**. Perhaps in retaliation, Superboy left the Legion in that story and didn't return until issue 280.

The artist who would make the biggest impact on the Legion in the Eighties first worked on the group in a backup story in issue 286. With issue 287, Keith Giffen began a long stint on the Legion. This included the first two Legion annuals (in 1982 & '83), which are definite cornerstones of any Legion of Super-Heroes collection.

In 1984, the regular **Legion of Super-Heroes** title was changed to **Tales of the Legion of Super-Heroes** and a new direct market book on better quality paper was introduced. This one is called **The Legion of Super-Heroes** (not to be confused with the short 4 issue run, all-reprint Legion title in 1973). After one year of new stories primarily drawn by Karl Kessel, the original series began to reprint the deluxe series as part of DC's so-called hardcover/softcover program.

Collecting the Legion is quite a task to undertake as they have been appearing in one place or another for 28 years. They turn up in such diverse places as **Action** and even in a number of issues of **Jimmy Olsen**. Collecting them requires a good listing, such as in a Price Guide, as well as lots of patience.

One of the most interesting uses of the Legion is in **Superman** 423 by Alan Moore,Curt Swan & George Perez. Labeled an "imaginary story" (which is rather oxymoronic when you think about it because *all* of these tales are certainly *imaginary*), it has a sequence in which the Legion visit Superman and he is hurt and upset to see Supergirl with them as this is after she has died. He confronts Brainiac 5 over the fact that the Legion knows the death dates of both himself and Supergirl as ancient history. What isn't addressed is that with time travel, Supergirl will always be alive somewhere that Superman can visit her

EXCLUSIVE
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SECRETS OF THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES
YES SUPERBOY - OUT OF ANYONE ELSE'S LIFE! IT'S NAME IS IT MEANS THE END OF THE LEGION!
IS IT THERE -- THE SECRET THAT WILL DESTROY THE LEGION FOR ALL TIME?
CARMINE INFANTINO
DAVE HUNT

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— thus taking the sting out of her passing. Interestingly, in **Superman** 423 the Legion appear in their costumes from the Curt Swan drawn stories back in the Sixties, rather than in the Marvel-style costumes which later artists gave many of the characters.

Even though their adventures largely occur in the 30th century, the Legion of Super-Heroes manage to remain a part of DC's larger continuity. They were even included in the **Crisis** series. Featuring many of the most popular characters in the DC mythos, the Legion remains the longest-running science fiction strip in comic books. **CF**

James Van Hise is the author of The Art of Al Williamson, a contributing editor of COMICS FEATURE, the former editor/publisher of RBCC, one of the earliest magazines about comic books, and a contributor to virtually every major publication about comic books.

Animated Antics

BY JAMES VAN HISE

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While the medium of animated cartoons has always been a natural for the larger than life exploits of colorfully costumed characters with fantastic powers, their portrayals there have been wildly inconsistent. The best superhero cartoons remain the first ever done—the Fleischer Brothers Superman cartoons made in the early 1940s. They captured all of the power, atmosphere and charm of comic books in those early, energetic years. If anything, they were even better than the comic books that inspired them!

The Superman cartoons made during The Sixties had decent stories but rather barren animation. Nothing special, but nothing terrible either.

In 1974, cartoons featuring Superman, Batman, and the like were brought together on one show but in separate stories. Over the years the heroes finally teamed together to form The Super Friends. This group was just another version of The Justice League of America since it featured only DC heroes. The problem with **The Super Friends** was the ever-present comedy relief of the Wonder Twins and a costumed monkey.

After twelve seasons, Hanna-Barbera wanted to do something special. Story editor Alan Burnett explains, "Every year we try and change the show, it's been on the air a long time. This year we tried to work closely with DC to capture the look of the comic books as much as possible.

"Last year, when I worked on the show, it was on earlier and so we had to make it a little more juvenile because the younger kids watch early in the morning. They're always concerned about violence at that hour, and how adult-oriented the show is. Then we were given a timeslot that was later in the morning and were able to aim at the older kids. So we added Cyborg and got rid of the more juvenile characters — the Wonder Twins — and tried to make the stories a little more adult.

"One of the stories that I'm particularly very proud of is the episode called 'The Fear', a Batman story which has the origin of Batman and involves the murder of his parents. This type of thing has never been done before on-Saturday morning."

"The Fear" features the villain, The Scarecrow, who frays Batman's nerves by making him remember the death of his parents in Crime Alley. Robin is able to rally the Super Powers team (now renamed from the more juvenile sounding Super Friends) to help The Dark Knight overcome his haunting memories.

While it is possible that changing some of the more grim details of Batman's origin might have been suggested in making "The Fear," it was decided that the origin is just too well known to change in a substantial way.

"You can't cheat on it," Burnett points out. "Because the Batman origin is so well known. Either you're going to show it, or you're not!" The story deals directly with the brutal murder of a child's parents before his eyes, a concept which ordinarily would have been shunned in the antiseptic world of Saturday morning cartoons.

"The way we got around the violence was to have a lot of cutaways to lightning in the sky when there were gunshots. We had to do it tastefully and we had to do it without showing a gun. We had to convey what was happening without ever really showing what was happening. I'm sure

THE SUPER POWERS TEAM: GALACTIC GUARDIANS

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that there has never been a Saturday morning show which dealt with the murder of the parents of the hero of the show, especially involving guns," Burnett adds. "There may have been shows where an incidental character has died on a Saturday morning show. I'm thinking of **The Smurfs**, and there was a lot of discussion about that within the network before it went on the air. Saturday morning rarely portrays that."

MEET THE SUPER POWERS TEAM

The Super Powers team consists of Earth's mightiest heroes, including Cyborg of the Teen Titans.

Superman, Wonder Woman, Batman, Robin, Firestorm and Cyborg make up the team. Past line-ups, when they were called The Super Friends, have included Aquaman, Hawkman, The Atom and The Flash.

While the main four members of the team have all existed for 40 years or more in the pages of comic books, Firestorm and Cyborg are newcomers who require more of an introduction. Descriptions of them are for the version that exists on **Galactic Guardians** and will vary somewhat from the comic book. The Galactic Guardians are unique to the Hanna-Barbera cartoons.

Firestorm is an unusual character whose powers are nuclear in nature. He has two alter egos, teenager Ronald Raymond and Professor Stein. Both must concentrate as one to merge into Firestorm. The hero's powers allow him to transform inanimate objects, turning swords into plowshares or chains into crepe paper. But since he's a teenage boy, his transformations often take whimsical forms — a slab of Kryptonite may become a football scoreboard. Firestorm can pass through solid objects, a ghostlike ability that comes in handy.

The newest member of the Super Powers Team is Cyborg. After a freak accident, his life was saved by replacing parts of his body with powerful metal prosthetics. Cyborg is the only member of the team who must live without a secret identity. Day after day, he must endure the stares of the curious since he cannot change the appearance of his half human, half cybernetic body. Although his cybernetic body parts have made him super human, they have also permanently robbed him of his normal appearance. In Firestorm, Cyborg has found a friend who can look beyond his bizarre appearance. The voice of Cyborg is Ernie Hudson, one of the stars of Columbia's **Ghostbusters** motion picture.

Cyborg joined the Super Powers team in "The Seeds Of Doom." When Darkseid attacks Earth, Firestorm manages to enlist Cyborg's aid. Only then, does he realize he is needed in the League of Justice.

The Super Powers Team operates from an all-new, super high tech Hall of Justice complex. From there they monitor the Earth and our galaxy for signs of trouble.

The principal villain faced by The Galactic Guardians is Darkseid, evil monarch of Apokolips. Always ready to carry out the dark lord's commands are his brutish son, Kalibak; his science expert, the venal and cowardly Desaad; and Mantis, the second most powerful being on Apokolips. (Darkseid, of course, is first.) The insect-like Mantis is a "power vampire," sapping enormous amounts of energy and converting it for his own use.

With the aid of his cruel minions, Darkseid has become the kingpin of intergalactic crime — a shadowy figure of evil behind every terror the superheroes must confront. For the cartoon series, the Lord of Apokolips reveals new powers of his own: super strength, the ability to project a mind-generated force field of invulnerability and a new twist on his Omega beams — the ability to transport anyone to another time and place.

Other interesting villains also crop up.

"We tried to work closely with DC comics," Burnett continues, "and we have gone through some of their villains that haven't been used in a while, like Felix Faust and the Royal Flush Gang. We even brought back the old Batman villain, The Joker. We also used the new Brainiac and try to stay away from villains who have been used too much, like Lex Luthor."

Although Burnett is pleased with the changes they were able to make, and the fact that they were able to do episodes such as "The Fear," he still wishes they could have made it more like the comic books.

"My one regret about the show is that it wasn't able to be as adult as I would have liked, or use the type of action I would have liked it to have. I think we made it as strong as we could. Saturday morning is a different place from comic books. There're a lot of restrictions. For example, you'll never see Superman punch out anybody on Saturday morning unless it's a robot — a robot that doesn't look like a human being."

Even though **Galactic Guardians** is the best version of these characters done in 12 seasons and the best superhero cartoons done since the Sixties, the show hasn't fared well against the greatest supervillains of them all—the ratings.

"Unfortunately, at this time there are no plans to do new shows for next year," Burnett reveals. "The show hasn't done all that well in the ratings this year. It's holding its own, but it's not leading it's slot. The main reason for that may be that it's been around for 12 years and older episodes have been syndicated. You can see Superman and Batman every day of the week in many markets, so on Saturday morning, even though these are new shots with new characters, they aren't watched. These shows will still be repeating on Saturday morning until September."

Could this spell doom for **The Galactic Guardians**? Burnett still feels confident about the future of these superheroes.

"We did a pilot last year for a new Batman show which would make him more of a creature of the night in more adult oriented stories. So I have no doubt that a couple years from now, The Super Powers Team will be back on the air in some form with new shows."

AND NOW, A GUIDE TO THIS PAST SEASON

ESCAPE FROM SPACE CITY

Executive Producers.....William Hanna
.....Joseph Barbera
Producer.....Larry Latham
Story Editor.....Alan Burnett

Eccentric billionaire, Dr. Moko, builds a utopian city in space. His obsession with secrecy nearly causes the demise of himself; his beautiful daughter, Kiri; the Superfriends; and Earth. Nonetheless, Darkseid's plans are once again thwarted by our heroes.

THE VOICES

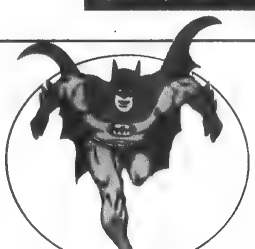
Batman.....Adam West
Firestorm.....Mark Taylor
Samurai.....
Superman.....Danny Dark
Wonder Woman.....B.J. Ward
Aquaman.....
Darkseid.....Frank Welker
Desaad.....Rene Auberjonois
Kalibak.....Frank Welker

THE DARKSEID DECEPTION

Wonder Woman's boyfriend, Steve Trevor, is kidnapped by Darkseid while the master of evil plays Steve's role in an attempt to overthrow the Super Powers' team.Steve is turned into a Neanderthal—a fate he will share with all inhabitants of earth. Naturally, the Superfriends outsmart the nefarious Darkseid and earth is saved.

THE VOICES

Wonder Woman.....B.J. Ward
Firestorm.....Mark Taylor
Superman.....Danny Dark
Batman.....Adam West
Robin.....Kasey Kasem
Darkseid.....Frank Welker
Desaad.....Rene Auberjonois
Kalibak.....Frank Welker



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THE FEAR

The scarecrow frays Batman's nerves by making him remember the death of his parents in Crime Alley. Robin rallies the Super Powers team to help him overcome his haunting memories.

THE VOICES

Batman.....Adam West
Robin.....Kasey Kasem
Wonder Woman.....B.J. Ward
Green Lantern.....
Hawkman.....
Samurai.....
Aquaman.....
Scarecrow.....

THE CASE OF THE STOLEN SUPER POWERS

Felix Faust and the Penguin are cellmates. Spirits arise to help them in their breakout and during the theft of the Faberge egg Penguin gains Superman's powers. Firestorm makes the villain a kryptonite costume and the episode ends with our villains back in jail.

THE VOICES

Superman.....Danny Dark
Wonder Woman.....B.J. Ward
Firestorm.....Mark Taylor
Hawkman.....
Samurai.....
Aquaman.....
Felix Faust.....
Penguin.....
Phantoms.....

THE SEEDS OF DOOM

Cyborg, a half man/half machine cybernetic wonder, refuses to join the Superfriends. However, when Darkseid unleashes the seeds of doom on earth, Firestorm manages to enlist Cyborg's aid and in the end Cyborg decides to join the League of Justice.

THE VOICES

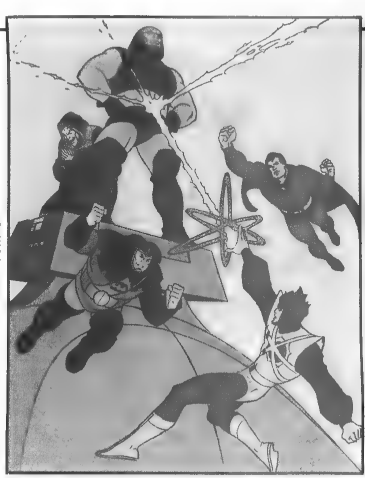
Cyborg.....Ernie Hudson
Firestorm.....Mark Taylor
Batman.....Adam West
Superman.....Danny Dark
Wonder Woman.....B.J. Ward
Hawkman.....
Robin.....Kasey Kasem
Aquaman.....
Samurai.....
Lex Luthor.....
Darkseid.....Frank Walker
Kalibak.....Frank Welker
Desaad.....Rene Auberjonois

SUPERMAN IS DEAD

We open on Superman's funeral. He's sent to his grave — the sun. Firestorm feels the whole nightmare is his fault. Darkseid plans to check the validity of the death and then take over. At Superman's Fortress of Solitude, we learn Superman may be in suspended animation. Ultimately he is rescued and Darkseid is thwarted once again.

THE VOICES

Superman.....Danny Dark
Firestorm.....Mark Taylor
Batman.....Adam West
Wonder Woman.....B.J.Ward
Cyborg.....Ernie Hudson
Green Lantern.....
Samurai.....
Hawkman.....
Flash.....
Aquaman.....
El Dorado.....
Robin.....
Darkseid.....Frank Walker
Kalibak.....Frank Welker
Desaad.....Rene Auberjonois



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THE WILD CARDS

A gang of thieves is lured by the disguised Joker (Ace) into working for Darkseid as the Royal Flush gang. As our heroes are captured, they are trapped on playing cards. In the end, Batman deceives Darkseid and saves the day.

THE VOICES

Cyborg.....Ernie Hudson
Superman.....Danny Dark
Batman.....Adam West
Wonder Woman.....B.J. Ward
Robin.....Kasey Kasem
Firestorm.....Mark Taylor
Joker.....
Darkseid.....Frank Walker

BRAINCHILD

When Cyborg is nabbed by the evil robot villain, Brainiac, he is transformed into an android before his "human-ness" and the Super Powers' team free him from Brainiac's nefarious trap.

THE VOICES

Cyborg..... Ernie Hudson
Firestorm..... Mark Taylor
Superman..... Danny Dark
Brainiac.....

GHOSTSHIP

Darkseid lures the Superfriends into outer space and Superman has his strength depleted. In an attempt to escape, they come across an alien space craft and aid the queen of a dying planet.

THE VOICES

Superman..... Danny Dark
Cyborg..... Ernie Hudson
Firestorm..... Mark Taylor
Darkseid..... Frank Welker
Kalibak..... Frank Welker
Desaad..... Rene Auberjonois

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THE BIZARRO STUPOR POWERS

Thr Bizarros decide they need their own Super Powers team and under the tutelage of the impish Mxyzptlk become the Stupor Powers. Cyborg, Wonder Woman and Firestorm are forced to reverse their backwards heroics until Mxyzptlk is tricked by a Stupor imp of the Superfriends' creation.

THE VOICES

Cyborg..... Ernie Hudson
Firestorm..... Mark Taylor
Wonder Woman..... B.J. Ward
Bizarro.....
Mxyzptlk.....

CF

FUN & PROFIT

BY MIKE BENTON

The 1986-1987 *Comic Book Price Guide* (16) came out a few months ago, and if you collect *any* comics at all, this is an important book for you to get.

One of the most interesting parts of the current Guide is the listing of the new "hot" comics from 1985 to 1986. These are the new comics that increased in value from 41 percent to 297 percent over a year's time.

You can learn a heckuva lot about the comic book market, speculation, readers' tastes and the potential for making money from investing in new comics by studying this list of hot titles.

Here is a guided tour and critical evaluation of the top money-making new comics from last year:

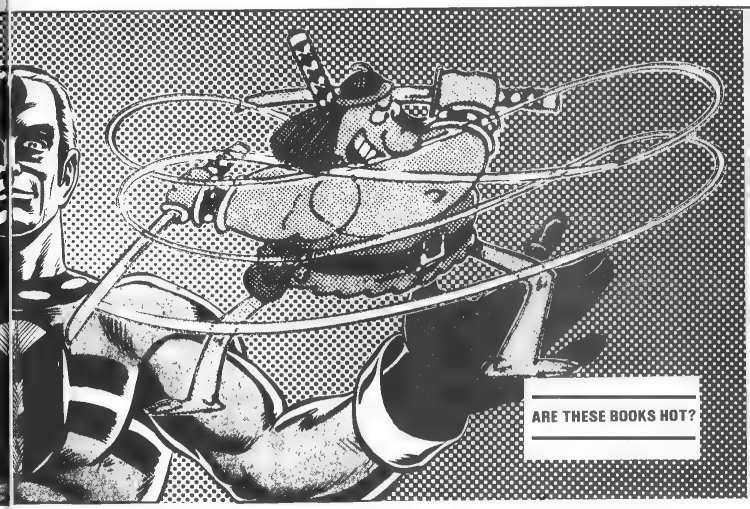
THUNDER CATS (Marvel) — The hottest comic of last year, although all of the interest and money centered around the first issue almost exclusively. I think that this one is a real fluke, and within a year or so, people will be amazed that collectors were all so hot and bothered over a seemingly nothing book. **Projected Growth: Slow; 1 has topped out; interest sliding.**

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN (Marvel) — The new adult approach to Marvel's most popular character has made this the hottest Spidey title of all. This will probably always be a strong title, and an essential book for the majority of Marvel collectors. **Projected Growth: Steady, reliable, and definitely a winner over the long-haul.**

THE TRANSFORMERS (Marvel) — The popularity and audience for this robot-title is immense, and I don't think that the fad/trend for this kind of book has peaked yet. However, I am very bothered by the second and third reprintings of *all* the issues. **Projected Growth: Continued, but prevalence of reprintings spells death to any real long-term value.**

GROO, THE WANDERER (Marvel) — A cult favorite with a devoted following. **Projected Growth: Unless it pulls in the more mainstream collector, this book will probably become another humor book oddity like Howard The Duck with about as much investment potential.**

HOT COMICS: A CRITICAL VIEW



LOVE AND ROCKETS (Fantagraphics) — A tough book to figure out. I think the peak for its popularity for this black and white magazine size book occurred right after the color comic **Mechanics** series. Demand has noticeably leveled off with the collected reprints. **Projected Growth: A book this good will always have an appreciative following, but speculative interest has unmistakably cooled.**

MIRACLEMAN (Eclipse) — Last summer there was an animal frenzy to gather as many copies of 1 as possible. It's a good book, but all the hot, hot hype has proven to be just that — more perceived than real interest among speculators. **Projected Growth: Respectable, but contain your excitement.**

GARGOYLE (Marvel) — Limited series; if you haven't made your money by now, forget it.

"SHATTER (First) — A curiosity item that rode the fad for Macintosh personal computers. Strictly for cross-over computer hobbyists whose eyesight has been so damaged by VDTs that they can't see how miserable this book is.

BLACK DRAGON (Marvel) — An "adult" (?) series from Marvel that is no longer being printed. Don't pay the high back issue prices.

THE ELEMENTALS (Comico) — Still a toss-up. If the artwork can maintain its above average and consistent quality, and if Comico manages to land newsstand distribution, then this could still get "hotter." **Projected Growth: Alive and kicking.**

G.I. Joe (Marvel) — If you've read this column regularly, you know my prejudice for this comic. I still think it's fabulously inflated beyond all collector worth, and that too many speculator dollars are being thrown at this title.Besides that, the blasted things have been reprinted as well. **Projected Growth: Still some money to be made before the little kiddies who collect this book wake up.**

ICEMAN (Marvel) — Limited series, limited investment, limited profits.

LONGSHOT (Marvel) — Ditto.

FLAMING CARROT (Renegade Press) — Because of the limited print run on this black and white book, and because of Bob Burden's unlquely bizarre approach, this book has an assured cult following for a while. **Projected Growth: Active interest among a small group of collectors.**

GRIMJACK (First Comics) — This book has a good chance to get hotter and stay hot. Probably one of the best bets among First Comics titles for speculators with foresight. **Projected Growth: Good.**

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE (DC/Marvel) — The early DC series has found renewed interest among back-issue collectors, but the new Marvel issues have not taken off as expected. **Projected Growth: Marvel could still turn this title around; watch carefully.**

ELFQUEST (Marvel) —Lots of readers, lots of issues, lots of reprints, not much money. **Projected Growth: Always a market, but slowing down, down, down.**

SAGA OF THE SWAMP THING (DC) — With the creative team changes on this title, I think I hear the sound of a hot title chilling out. Start taking your profits on this one, and sell the Moore issues before short-term memories fade. **Projected Growth: Uncertain.**

AMBUSH BUG (DC) — Off the wall book that seemed funny at the time. **Projected Growth: Nope.**

NIGHTCRAWLER (Marvel) — X-Men miniseries with minimoney potential. **Projected Growth: Snooze.**

PHOENIX, THE UNTOLD STORY (Marvel) — X-Men one shot that evidently a lot of collectors missed when it was issued **Projected Growth: It's grown.**

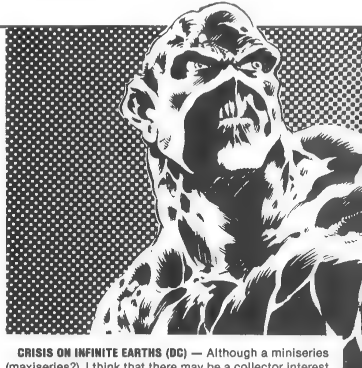
ROCKET RACOON (Marvel) —Miniseries. **Projected Growth: Fizzling.**

V (DC) — Nobody will want this one next year.

MAGE (Comico) — Put your money on the other Comico titles if you're looking for bucks.

RAWHIDE KID (Marvel) —Limited series; it's over with, forget it.

DNAGENTS (Eclipse) — One of the better continuing series from Eclipse. **Projected Growth: Watch Eclipse's general growth and state of health for hints.**



CRISIS ON INFINITE EARTHS (DC) — Although a miniseries (maxiseries?), I think that there may be a collector interest in these 12 issues for awhile to come. Too many significant changes in the DC universe for fans *not* to collect. **Projected Growth: Definite leveling off, but always a stable interest.**

FEMFORCE (Americomics) — Big Bazooms, little bucks, and do you really want these in your closet? **Projected Growth: 42-D cup.**

SOLOMON KANE (Marvel)— Miniseries. **Projected Growth: Zilch-o.**

WEST COAST AVENGERS (Marvel) — Similar to **Web of Spider-Man**, but not quite as strong a sure thing. **Projected Growth: I feel good about this one; keep an eye on the storyline and the art team.**

And there you have a critical overview of the hot comics from last year and the predictions for the months ahead.

To give you an idea who is publishing the "hot" books, here's a breakdown on the above books by publisher:

MARVEL	16 titles
DC	4 titles
ECLIPSE	2 titles
COMICO	2 titles
FIRST	2 titles
RENEGADE	1 title
FANTAGRAPHICS	1 title
AMERICOMICS	1 title

Prediction for next year: DC will gain a dramatically greater share of the "hot" titles at Marvel's expense. Look for one or two independents to snag a few more hot titles from Marvel's grasp as well.

HOT/TIPS...HOT/TIPS...HOT/TIPS...HOT/TIPS

BEWARE THE NEW PRICE SPREAD.

As long as we're talking about changes in the marketplace from last year to this year, you need to be aware of an important price restructuring in the Price Guide that greatly effects back issue collectors and investors in Golden Age and Silver Age books.

This year, there is a new price spread for MINT comics published from 1930 to 1960.

In the very beginning days of the price guide, back in 1970, a Mint comic book was worth *twice* as much as a Good comic book. Gradually, the price spread changed so that a Mint comic was soon valued at three times a Good comic, then four, and finally two years ago a Mint comic was deemed to be worth *six* times the value of a Good comic.

The current price guide now lists a Mint comic as being worth *seven* times the value of a Good comic.

It's obvious that top-condition books, particularly from the 1940s, are becoming harder and harder to find.

What is also important is that a Mint comic book will give you a far greater return as an investment item than a Good comic. Consider this example:

Suppose a comic in Good condition is worth $10. The same comic in Mint would then be worth about $70. If the comic went up to $12 in value next year for a Good copy, then a Mint copy would be worth $84. In one case you get a $2 profit, in the other case you would get a $12 return, or six times as much.

So what does this mean?

If you collect for investment, then buy near mint or better books. You'll see a more dramatic return on your investment. Plus — the market for high quality books seems to be protected from cyclical ups and downs that the rest of the back issues comics seem subject to.

On the other hand, if you collect for fun and to read the comics, then go for the Very Good to Fine condition books. I feel that the best bargains, condition and pricewise, for comics published before 1964, are for those books in VERY GOOD to FINE condition. These books have a ready market and a good re-sale value, and are underpriced (relatively speaking) in comparison to VERY FINE to NEAR MINT books from this same time period.

And in this same vein, one of the great bargains is in the early, pre-World War II Golden Age comics (1938 to 1944) that are solid GOOD or better condition with non-brittle pages. Buy these and hang onto them, cause in five more years — well, I told ya so ...

CF

MIKE BENTON is the author of Comic Book Collecting For Fun and Profit (Crown Publishers).

FILES MAGAZINES

(All files magazines are perfect bound with color covers and at least 60 pages)

Library

THE STAR TREK FILES

Go where no fan has gone before in a fantastically detailed and completely unique series devoted to everyone's favorite science fiction show, Gene Roddenberry's creation is showcased in cast biographies, character profiles, interviews, accurate episode guides and much more. This is one series you simply cannot afford to miss!

WHERE NO MAN HAS GONE BEFORE..... $9.95

STAR TREK FILE ONE ..... THE EARLY VOYAGES
STAR TREK FILE TWO..... TIME PASSAGES
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STAR TREK FILE FOUR ..... ON THE EDGE OF FOREVER
STAR TREK FILE FIVE..... MISSION: YEAR TWO
STAR TREK FILE SIX..... JOURNEY TO ETERNITY
STAR TREK FILE SEVEN ..... THE DEADLY YEARS
STAR TREK FILE EIGHT ..... RETURN TO TOMORROW

(The above files are $5.95 each.)

And then came the movies when the fans of the show simply would not let it die! The adventure continues in a series of episodes even more elaborate in the production and special effects. These volumes combine interviews with story synopsis and perceptive analysis to retell the continuing Star Trek adventure

STAR TREK MOVIE FILE ONE. THE MOTION PICTURE
STAR TREK MOVIE FILE TWO..... WRATH OF KHAN
STAR TREK MOVIE FILE THREE. SEARCH FOR SPOCK

(These volumes are $5.95 each)

THE DARK SHADOWS FILES

Dark Shadows is the most unique soap opera of all time! It is the only continuing daytime television series to feature a vampire as the central character as well as the only gothic soap opera of all time. This unique series is showcased in a series of episode guides, interviews, character profiles and cast biographies that not only retells the on-screen story but takes you behind the scenes to witness the phenomenon in the making and how everyone reacted to becoming the world's favorite horror ensemble!

THE DARK SHADOWS FILE ONE.... COLLINWOOD
THE DARK SHADOWS FILE TWO..... RETURN

(The above volumes are $5.95 each)

MPS

Please!

ORDER ON COUPON PAGE

PULL
IT OUT
AND
PLAY IT!!!
A COMICS FEATURE
ROLE-PLAYING
GAME BY STEVE PERRIN

Okay, you're at least mildly interested in these columns and other mentions you have seen about role playing games. You think you might want to give it a try, but you don't think you want to give it a $12.00 try (the price of an entry-level role playing game such as **Dungeons and Dragons**). Besides, you're not sure your friends would like it, and if you don't have someone to play with there's not much reason to have a game sitting on your shelf.

Well—as a special gift from **Comics Feature** I'm going to give you a quick set of rules that can get you role playing in ten minutes. Before I go any further, I should point out that this column is copyrighted as is the rest of the magazine. This doesn't interfere with your legal rights to read or play the game, but don't print it and sell it anywhere without our permission. Okay? (Ah, the joys of high finance...)

So the next time you have a half dozen friends sitting around a party with nothing to talk about and shuddering at the thought of another **Monopoly** game, try **INSTANT ROLE PLAYING.**

FIRST STEPS

The only equipment needed is a single six-sided die (there's two of them in that **Monopoly** game set). The game moves faster if everyone has a die, but Big Bird says that sharing is a wonderful experience,and who are we to disagree with America's favorite television personality?

This die is the sole determiner of success in the game. Low is Bad, High is Good. For variety, you can reverse this in the next game, making Low Good and High Bad. However, each game should use the die consistently.

Tell each of your friends (the players) to pick a favorite "type". These types are seen in every pot-boiler novel and television mini-series. They can include the Steely-Jawed Investigator, the Empty-Headed Debutante, the Smart-Alec Kid, the Stalwart Military Man, the Wise Mentor, the All-American Boy, the Spaced-Out Hophead,the Cautious Games Player, the Bombastic Coward, the Bitter Recluse, the Snide Social Critic, etc. Try to make sure that each is at least a variation on the character another one takes. An adventure full of Spaced-Out Hopheads isn't much fun,as the characters have no dramatic diversity. Of course, after looking at the proposed game scenario below, you might want to guide their choices to make sure they have characters who will be appropriate for the job involved.

Remind each player that he must play the character type just as he has seen him in a hundred movies and television stories.This is the basics of role playing. Each player should pick a name for his type and think about his background.

THE GAME

Now that you have your playing equipment (the die) and the characters (the "types"), you need a plot to immerse them in.

For a starting game, you should probably take a background from some book or movie you are all familiar with. One fairly obvious candidate is the galaxy of **Star Wars** This is very useful because the whole background is a jumble of warring criminal gangs, evil empires, desperate rebels and exotic races. Also, if you leave out "The Force" (except as an ace-in-the-hole of the villain, or a special power in one of the characters) you don't have to worry about magic, super powers or any of the other potential complications of many of the fantasy role playing games available.

So what are our heroes going to do? First you need a plot; something that will hold their attention and get them interested. A simple criminal conspiracy should do for the first time around. For example, let's say that the child of an Important Person has been kidnaped.If the Important Person doesn't do what the kidnaper wants (give him lots of money, provide the plans for the Death Star, surrender his rebel band, whatever) the child will not be killed, but instead sold into slavery of some form — the nastier the better.

Why are our heroes involved? Lots of possible reasons. For instance: the Empty-Headed Debutante and the All-American Boy are the child's longtime friends; the Steely-Jawed Investigator is called in to find the kidnaper; the Hophead overhears the conspirators discuss where they have the child; etc.

Let the players go with this; just sit back and give them hints when they go too far afield.If they need to be able to listen in on a vital conversation, sneak up on a conspirator, remember a vital bit of information, fly a speedster, or do anything else, use the die to decide. Basically, a high roll (4-6 on the die) means they succeed, a low roll (1-3) means they fail. If you need to know how well they succeed or how miserably they fail, remember that higher is better (a 4 just makes it,a 6 is wonderful) and lower is worse (a 3 is very close, a 1 is abysmal).

Feel free to modify these rolls through circumstance. If the Investigator is trying to overhear a conversation or remember a bit of previous evidence, his success chance is probably a 3-6, with failure only on 1 or 2. If the Debutante is trying to sneak around, her success chance is probably a 5 of 6, with 1-4 as a failure. After all, those high heels are hell to be stealthy in.

If the players tire of just playing their characters in an investigatory situation, but they haven't managed to uncover any of the plot, toss in a complication. The Important Person is given a deadline, but the notification has a clue in it; some of the investigators are assaulted by hired thugs, who either beat them up and accidentally leave a clue to their hideout, or lose and spill their hideout's location; or someone from left field suddenly appears with a clue — the Hophead, for instance, may not be a character, but a non-player character (NPC) who comes up with the vital information just as the investigation is burning out.

COMBAT

Fighting, if it happens, is a variation on the success system given above. Both participants roll the die. If the rolls are the same, nothing happens.If they are different, the higher roll is successful. The difference determines the result. A 5-point difference means the loser is out of the fight (if punched, he's knocked out; if shot, he's dead or dying), a 4 or 3 point difference means the loser is -1 to further rolls (he's wounded or stunned),a 1 or 2 point difference is of no great significance unless the gamemaster (you) wants it to be. If a character is ever in a position where he cannot possibly effect a fresh opponent (he's -5 rolls from accumulated bad rolls) he is also out of the fight.

Characters may enter a fight with an advantage (the investigator may be given a 2 in the first round because he snuck up on/surprised an opponent; etc.), depending on what you want to do.

AN EXAMPLE

You confront The Investigator and the Debutante with three thugs who tell them to "Stop nosing around or someone is going to get hurt." You ask the players "What're you going to do?" The player of the Investigator says,"I'm going to clobber the lead thug and yell at the Debutante to get out of here." The player of the Debutante says, "Not on your tintype, buster. I'm screaming and hitting the thug nearest me with my purse. Remember,I have that bronze stauette we just picked up in the purse."

The investigator is normally 2 in combat, and you give him a further 1 because the thugs weren't expecting a physical response. You give the Debutane 1 for surprise and 1 for the heavy statuette. The thugs are all normal. The Investigator rolls the die and gets a 3. Adding his 3 for this round gives him a 6. You roll for the thug he attacks and get a 2, giving a 4 point difference. The lead thug, the spokesman, is now -1 in combat. The Debutante player rolls a 5, which gives her 6 for the round. (Remember, she's normally -1). Your roll for this thug is a 1! That's a 5 point difference, and the thug drops like a stone, unconscious.

The third thug is surprised, so you give him a roll to see if he even reacts in this round. You get a 4 (high), so he does.He hauls out a sap and attacks the Debutante, figuring to use her as a hostage. You roll for him and get a 4. The Debutante does not have the advantage of the purse for this fight but still has the surprise advantage. Her player rolls a 2, which remains a 2 because of the 1 for surprise. The thug wins by 2 points, so he hasn't hurt the Debutante, but gets some advantage. You rule that he grabbed the heavy purse,so she can't use it again.

Everything that can happen at one time has happened,so we go to the next round. The Investigator attacks the lead thug again.However, he only has 2 for his natural ability, he's lost the 1 for surprise. His player rolls a 1, making a total of 3. You roll a 6 for the thug, which is a 5 because he's now -1. He wins,but ordinarily wouldn't be able to hurt the Investigator. Since he rolled as good as he possibly could, you tell the Investigator that he is now only 1 against this opponent.The Debutante's player says. "I yell 'give me back my purse, you creep!' and strike the goon with my fist". The Debutante is normally a -1 in combat, and her player rolls a 2 — making her roll a 1.The thug rolls a 5, a difference of 4 points. Now the Debutante is -2 in combat. We go on to the next round.

The Investigator's roll and your roll for the lead thug repeat themselves. This time the difference is a 3, and the Investigator loses another point against this thug, and this time it comes out of his number of points before he's out of the fight. The Debutante improves her rolling, however, she

gets a 6, which becomes a 4. The thug gets a 1, which means that now he's -1. On to the next round.

The Investigator improves slightly, he gets a 5, which with his reductions means it becomes a 4. The thug rolls a 1, which with his -1 means a 4 point difference. He drops.The Debutante rolls a 5, while her opponent rolls a 2.Her minuses takes her roll to a 3, while his -1 takes his roll to a 1. The Debutante wins without doing damage, so you roll that she got her purse back.

On the next round, the Investigator and Debutante concentrate on her foe. The Investigator rolls a 5, which means he has a 6. The Debutante rolls a 4, which becomes a 3 (she's -2 for being the Debutante and damaged, but she's 1 for the heavy purse). The thug rolls a 3. He's even with the Debutante, but loses -1 because of the Investigator's strike.Eventually our heroes beat him down.

THE FINAL CONFRONTATION

By now, our heroes know where to find the badguys. This can be as simple as an abandoned warehouse or as complex as a high-tech hideout on a gas-giant planet. Let your players come up with a plan to get into the hideout without alerting the villains and perhaps getting their hostage killed or shipped off to another locale. There should be lots of possibilities for all the players to use their characters to the fullest.

Perhaps the Hophead has discovered that his chemical divergencies have allowed him to tap into the Force. The Debutante can use her society connections to get into the office of the chief badguy (who is in actuality the highly place rival of the Important Person, or something similar); the Investigator can sneak into a loading dock or cargo hold; the Computer Nerd can circumvent the security system; etc. There are many possibilities, be sure to suggest them to the players if they haven't thought of them.After all, it's everyone's first game, and the idea is for the players to have fun.

From there, the players can rescue the captive and foil the plot. What more could they want? Praise them all highly, give their characters what rewards seem appropriate, and ask them if they'd like to do this again, maybe this time with some more elaborate rules to cover all the little problems this system didn't cover (differences in weapons, or naturally better physical abilities, or nature versus nature, or whatever has come up). You may find a lot of encouragement to go out and buy that role playing game. Role playing is an addictive pastime, and a lot of fun for all concerned.

A few of the possible choices to role play— PICK THE ONE THAT APPEALS TO YOU OR MAKE UP YOUR OWN!

Steve Perrin created both the Superworld and Elfquest games as well as scores of modules and related gaming items. He is COMICS FEATURE's resident expert on roleplaying.

Library

FILES MAGAZINES

(All files magazines are perfect bound with color covers and at least 60 pages)

THE DR. WHO FILES

The world's greatest traveller of time and space will take you on incredible voyages of discovery through episode guides, cast biographies, character profiles, interviews and much more. The series is created by John Peel, a founding member of the British Doctor Who Appreciation Society. Peel, perhaps the world's leading authority on British fantasy television, is a contributor to **Cult Tv** and **Doctor Who Monthly** as well as former editor of **Fantasy Empire**

CLASSIC FILE I.....**BAKER BEGINS**
CLASSIC FILE II.....**MORE BAKER**
(Note these two reprint **THE FIRST BAKER YEARS***)*

DOCTOR WHO FILE I....**THE FOURTEENTH SEASON**
DOCTOR WHO FILE II....**THE FIFTEENTH SEASON**
DOCTOR WHO FILE III....**THE SIXTEENTH SEASON**
DOCTOR WHO FILE FOUR. THE SEVENTEENTH SEASON
DOCTOR WHO FILE FIVE. THE EIGHTEENTH SEASON
DOCTOR WHO FILE SIX.....**THE PERTWEE YEARS**
DOCTOR WHO FILE SEVEN....**THE EIGHTH SEASON**
DOCTOR WHO FILE EIGHT....**THE NINTH SEASON**
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MARVEL'S new universe™

An exclusive guided tour of the history-making event!

BY JAMES VAN HISE

Twenty-five years ago, Marvel Comics began its universe with the first issue of The Fantastic Four. This summer that anniversary is being marked by the institution of a New Universe. Editor-in-chief Jim Shooter explains that the best way he can imagine to celebrate Marvel's 25th anniversary is to be just as creative as those original talents.

"To truly honor the[se] innovative creators, we, too, must innovate and strive to revolutionize the medium as they did a quarter-century ago. And so, with that goal in mind, we created The New Universe."

The reason that these initial 8 titles being released are referred to as New Universe books despite the existence of previous Marvel comics is that the approach will differ from the usual.

"This is what Jim Shooter has been trying to instill in the regular books, but it's tough," explains Eliot Brown, one of the editors on the New Universe titles. "The regular books are well established in their own pretty crazy universe where all sorts of things happen that perhaps are not realistic. They have to be explained with weak explanations that wouldn't stand up under close scrutiny. We're trying to avoid that by having reality play a big part in the comics."

"We're going to start right here in the world that's outside these walls," Shooter notes. "That's The New Universe. Everything in it is going to be here and now. It will be built on the foundation of real life. It will take place in real time. It will be a world you can believe in because it is a world that you live in."

Brown adds that, "All of these characters are new. There's no interaction with what we call The Marvel Universe. It's a separate universe," he stresses. "It's very different, taking place in the world outside your window as best we can and as close to that as we can make it. There's got to be variances, though, because the world outside your window is probably not as exciting as it could be. There have to be certain technological advances which aren't in today's headlines — but perhaps in tomorrow's. But there's no anti-gravity. No alien of the week or things like that. We're trying not to use strict comic conventions although we'll have to wind up doing it at some point. We're trying to avoid the most hackneyed and cliched ones."

One noticeable way that the New Universe books will be different from the Marvel Universe books is that the adventures will take place in an identifiable time frame, rather than in the Marvel-style of time in which the last 25 years of comics have taken place in 7 years of perceived time.

"It's the late 1980s in these books," Brown states, "and we'll be progressing year by year." The intent is to have a year's worth of comics take place over a period of 12 months. That's the plan, but it is open to possible revisions. "It may wind up impossible to maintain it," Brown admits, "so we may just never mention time again!"

One of the first New Universe titles to appear is **Star Brand**, which is created and written by Jim Shooter, pencilled by John Romita Jr. and inked by Al Williamson. "So far, that's the prettiest one of the lot," Eliot Brown reveals. He is co-editing the book with John Morelli.

The Star Brand is a weapon more powerful than any other in the universe. It is the most coveted, feared, loved and hated thing in existence. It falls into the hands of an Earthman, Kenneth Connell.

"He accidentally stumbles upon an alien — but it's not such an accident," Brown states, describing the premise which launches the story in the first issue. "The alien passes on the Star Brand instrument/device and then presumably expires. The alien chose this fellow because the guy, for lack of a better word, has The Right Stuff. He has the courage and integrity to handle this powerful weapon. The trouble is that it's a well known weapon throughout the universe and is actively sought by a number of people. He also tries to be a normal man and live his life. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't."

Although **Star Brand** sounds like a futuristic science fiction comic the setting is today. "Today, or something like it," says Brown. "The original premise dictates that there is some alien intervention. But he's trying to keep it quiet."

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The book being written by Eliot Brown and John Morelli, pencilled by Herb Trimpe and inked by Joe Sinnott is **Spitfire and the Troubleshooters.**

"It's about a lone, maverick adventurer/scientist who's working for a multinational munitions man," says Brown, describing the premise which sets up the action for the series. "The guy is sort of like General Motors making tanks. Presumably his real business is not munitions, but I wonder how much of GM's profits are from tank building? Be that as it may, that's the kind of deal that it is. He's inventing a construction suit which can be used under adverse conditions such as underwater or working up high without danger of falling. It's a powered suit that can pick things up and move them around," Brown continues.

"Trouble comes when the inventor finds out that the suit is going to be used by the financier for what he believes are the wrong purposes. There follows a struggle of ownership and the scientist is killed. Then the daughter steps in, not really knowing the facts. And that's where it becomes really interesting."

Dr. Henning Swensen's daughter is Jenny Swensen, a full professor of Applied Engineering at MIT. Her father had nicknamed her Spitfire and the name stuck. When Dr. Swensen dies mysteriously, his inventions are claimed by his employer, Karl Krotze. It's all legal, but that doesn't stop Jenny from taking action.

"She has to steal everything," states Brown. "The Troubleshooters are a bunch of her students at MIT. Perhaps a better name for them would be misfits, but no, they're troubleshooters.

Jenny uses her father's suit, the M.A.C.S. (Man Amplified Construction Suit) to wage war on Krotze while constantly evading the law. But she realizes that she too is perverting her father's invention by using it as a weapon.

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"Nightmask is created by Archie Goodwin and written by Archie and pencilled by Tony Salmons," Brown continues, beginning this special guided tour through the New Universe.

"**Nightmask** is essentially about a kid, Keith Remsen, whose parents are killed in an explosion — from an assasination attempt. Keith is put in a coma by the attack and when he comes out of it he has the ability to enter other people's dreams to help find information or fight a psychic battle or whatever the story is about."

Keith enters dreams while in a trance. His identity in those dreams is obscured by a psychic mask which covers his face. When Keith emerges from the trance, the mask fades from his face, diminishing until it is only a crescent-shaped scar on his forehead.

Beside Keith when he emerges from a trance is his 13 year old sister, Theodora — or Teddy for short. Confined to a wheelchair, she cannot move through dreams such as Keith does but she does serve as his physical monitor and anchor in reality.

Under the auspices of Dr. Lucian Ballad and Lita Mercado (Teddy's physical therapist), Keith and Teddy found a unique and selective psychoanalytical consulting service. They help the seriously disturbed by working through their dreams. Hidden by his psycho-physically manifested Night-mask, Keith remains anonymous in his client's dreams, and is protected from their psychological defenses.

The adventures of **Nightmask** range from wildest fantasy to starkly frightening reality — and to the humorous and delightful. The dangers, however, are always real — including the possibility of dream-death. The Gnome moves through dreams opposing Nightmask.

The joys and jagged edges of the "hard" world, too, loom large. There are problems born of the weight of the awesome responsibility shared by 18-year-old Keith and his 13-year-old sister. There is also the strain of growing up too fast.

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Combat is what he does best. He is Mark Hazard, a Vietnam veteran who has gone on to become a soldier of fortune, selling his fighting and leadership abilities to military causes he believes in — or at least can live with.

Hazard has been through all the training — Rangers, Special Forces, Recondo School in 'Nam, HALO and the Royal Jungle Tracking School of Malaysia. He is a West Point dropout who then served three tours in Vietnam, mostly as part of the Special Mission Team operation, deep in enemy territory.

Throughout his life, Hazard has been a misfit, at odds with his parents, schools and with authority in general. But in combat he found himself. Having been on the edge, close to danger, he has not been able to adjust to living less intensely. Being a mercenary is what he does to feel whole.

But his drive and devotion have cost him. His wife, Joan, whom he still loves, has divorced him and remarried to a business executive, Gordon Landry, who is now raising Hazard's 12-year-old son, Scott. In addition, Hazard's father died never having forgiven Mark for quitting West Point. His mother, an old-fashioned Army wife, still holds that grudge and adds it her disapproval over Mark's giving up on Vietnam and the Army when he decided it was a war he shouldn't be in. The Mercs fighting at his side are Mark Hazard's only true family.

Marvel promises that blazing action will be the mainstay in **Merc**, but poignancy, drama and humor will be in evidence as well.

Merc's first issue is penned by Peter David and drawn by Gray Morrow. Subsequent issues will be written by Doug Murray, who is writing **The 'Nam** series for Marvel. *(see last issue for an interview with Doug Murray.)*

Written by Tom DeFalco and drawn by Ron Frenz, **Kickers, Inc.** is something different, as well as something familiar.

"It's about a team of football players, one of whom has a super power," explains DeFalco. "They band together to help people who don't know where else to go to get help.

Jack Magnicomo is the hightest paid professional athlete in the world. But a freak lab accident causes his bodily processes to be further enhanced — he is much stronger and faster than before. Unfortunately his brother is dead as a result.

"There's a particular combination of factors that allow him to be affected," Brown explains. "Jack takes a bunch of his team players along and they form **Kickers, Inc.** The others are not enhanced, they are simply football players who are tougher than normal."

But this is the New Universe. They don't just become a super team overnight with all that that entails.

"For example," Brown reveals, "when they consider their headquarters, they have to arrange financing. When they buy a car, the car has to be made and it will take awhile. They'll be renting a car in the meantime. That sort of realism. The stuff they want doesn't spring magically from a mysterious autobody shop in midtown and the building doesn't spring up like a mushroom overnight — it has to be built."

PSI FORCE

Written by Steve Perry and drawn by Mark Texeira, **Psi-Force** continues the New Universe trend of portraying the fantastic against a realistic backdrop.

A group of teenage runaways, all aged 15-18, possess paranormal powers: They include a healer, an astral projector, a telepath, a telekinetic and someone who can use his psionic power to explode things. Their powers make them valuable commodities that many individuals, organizations and even governments would like to exploit — or else destroy to keep out of the hands of others who might use them to further conflicting goals.

One man tries to protect the outcasts. He organizes the kids and seeks a place of safety — but is murdered before he can bring his plan together. Then the five kids discover that as a group they can mindmeld and create a being who possesses abilities of all of the kids put together. This being, the Psi-Hawk, is in the image of the murdered guardian.

Together the five youths wage a guerilla war to protect themselves as well as others of their kind.

"We're not rediscovering the wheel, but we are making it a little more realistic. We're trying to have consequences for actions and as much realism as possible while keeping it interesting."

Eliot Brown, Editor

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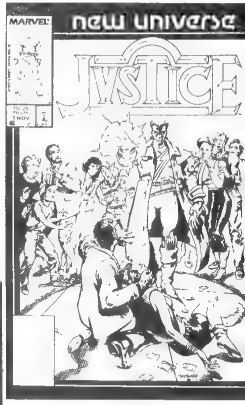
Seven people, out of place in the world. Seven people, afraid of what they are — afraid of what might become of them.

They are paranormals. People that look different. Act different. Are different. There's Dave Landers, Dennis Cuzinski, Lenore Fenzl, Dr. Randy I'Brien, Jeff Walters, Charlotte Beck and Stephanie Harrington.

Seven of the most dangerous beings ever to walk the Earth.

We can't see why until late July. **D.P. 7** is written by Mark Gruenwald and drawn by Paul Ryan.



DIRECTIONS OLD AND NEW

Although some of these titles, such as **Justice** and **Kickers, Inc.**, seem to be superhero comics, Eliot Brown hastens to point out this is true only to a degree.

"In our attempts to instill reality into this, you don't have the standard superhero action. They may most closely resemble the superhero but you couldn't exactly say: this is a superhero. It may be too bold a statement, but I don't think we really have superheroes."

Does this mean that there also won't be what could be termed supervillains?

"Maybe," says Brown. "If we don't have superheroes, how can we have supervillains?

"One problem with the New Universe is that it is new. In rushing ahead the way we have, we threw out a lot of ideas—some of them are good and some of them are bad. The ones that are bad we continued to throw out. In trying to say we're going to have the climactic struggle of good and evil, that doesn't always enter into real world problems—there's always shades of gray. It's these shades of gray that we're going to try to highlight because there's not always a clearcut good and evil, hero versus villain, even today. That's the kind of reality we're going to make more interesting."

Is the New Universe designed to appeal to people who find the comic book form interesting from afar, but have been too embarrassed to buy books starring heroes in colorful skintight costumes?

Brown recognizes the problem but doesn't view the New Universe as the solution. "They're going to look like comic books, unfortunately, so they'll have the same problems. There's going to be no special packaging (other than the identifying logo at the top indicating that they are part of Marvel's New Universe line). There's going to be no special arrangement on the shelves that I know about. Hopefully, there'll be a little more advertising going on. But otherwise they're going to look like comics while being a little different from the ordinary.

"They are both newsstand and direct market and they're not aimed at any particular segment. Just as the Marvel books appeal to a huge age group from 9 to 30 and over, I would think that the New Universe titles would appeal to the same. If a 9 year old reads the book, he'll pick up one level of things, a 20 year old will find a little more and a 30 year old will find more yet. But that's no more or less than an ordinary comic book. That's what I'm hoping for.

"We're not rediscovering the wheel," states Brown, analyzing the balance between New Universe and Marvel Universe, "but we are making it a little more realistic. We're trying to have consequences for actions and as much realism as possible while keeping it interesting."

It's 1986, and the New Universe has begun to arrive.

"This is another Archie Goodwin creation," says Brown. "Justice is a cop from another dimension — a higher, different plane of reality who crosses over in a way that we don't quite understand, but which will be revealed eventually. He has a lack of memory.

"Being a cop from another dimension, he has different abilities from ordinary police. With one hand he can detect an aura around people and if it's bad, he raises his other hand and fries them. In his own world that is a service that he provides. In this world it's somewhat more complicated. He finds out there is good and bad in everybody."

In our world, Justice finds himself pursued by people whose aura reveals them to be good — most notably Rebecca Chambers, from the Department of Justice, and Hoyt Pittman, a hard-nosed law-and-order FBI agent.

Rebecca is first appalled by Justice and what he does, but then she gradually becomes uncertain about pursuing him — and is eventually even attracted to him.

Pittman, too, gains a grudging respect for Justice, though he's no less determined to end his vigilante career.

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STRIP SEARCH

BY RON GOULART

The conspicuous newspaper success of such science fiction and fantasy features as **Buck Rogers** and **Tarzan** in the early Thirties inspired several syndicates to give similar material a try. The Hearst organization, as noted in our last column, launched **Brick Bradford** in 1933 and followed it the next year with **Flash Gordon**, the subject of our column this time.

Drawn by Alex Raymond and written by Don Moore, **Flash Gordon** began, as a Sunday page, on January 7, 1934. "World Comes To End," announced a newspaper headline in the first panel. "Strange New Planet Rushing Toward Earth — Only Miracle Can Save Us, Says Science." In movie fashion we are then shown shots of the African jungle "as howling blacks await their doom," the Arabian desert, where "the Arab...faces Mecca and prays for salvation," and Times Square, where "a seething mass of humanity watches a bulletin board describing the flight of the comet." All is not lost, however, since Dr. Hans Zarkov is working day and night to perfect "a device with which he hopes to save the world." As fate would have it, an eastbound airliner is struck by a meteor while passing right over Zarkov's home. Among those parachuting to safety from the illfated craft are "Flash Gordon, Yale graduate and world-reknowned polo player, and Dale Arden, a passenger." What with one thing and another, Flash and Dale end up in the good doctor's backyard. Zarkov happens to have a rocket ship there, and he forces the pair to accompany him on a comet-busting mission. This results, eventually, in their landing on the planet Mongo.

Although Mongo, with its castles and deep forests, had an 1890s operetta feel, the concerns of the 1930s were always cropping up. Wars, famines, invasions, dictators. Ming, the merciless emperor of much of the planet,was an embodiment of the Yellow Peril. His anti-white bias and purple pronouncements made him a sort of galactic Fu Manchu. Raymond was much influenced by the costume movies of the Thirties and as the decade progressed their influence could be seen increasingly in the costumes, palaces and landscapes of Flash's adopted planet. Recently I got the opportunity to look over quite a few of the movie stills he used for scrap. The artist was especially fond of DeMille's **The Crusades** (1935) and **The Adventures of Robin Hood** (19838), the Errol Flynn swashbuckler.

ALEX RAYMOND

Alexander Gillespie Raymond was in his early twenties when he drew his first **Flash Gordon** pages. Although he'd never signed a strip before, his work had been appearing in newspapers for the past couple of years. His last job before taking off for Mongo had been ghosting Luman Young's **Tim Tyler's Luck** and that followed periods of assisting on **Blondie** and **Tillie the Toiler.** He'd been making $20 a week in the King Features bullpen when he was tapped to draw **Flash** and **Jungle Jim** and the **Secret Agent X-9** daily. His earliest work on **Flash Gordon** was a mite stiff, his inking somewhat uncertain. After a year or so, though, his work improved greatly and he mastered the drybrush technique of rendering, an approach then much in favor among pulp illustrators and some slick magazine artists as well.

Raymond was especially influenced, as mentioned two issues ago, by the magazine work of an illustrator named Matt Clark. Another important influence was Austin Briggs. Briggs had been working, in such magazines as **Blue Book**, in a heroic style similar to the one Raymond adopted in the middle Thirties.When I interviewed Briggs some years ago, he was unclear about when he'd gone to work assisting Raymond and exactly how he got the job. "I think I met him at a cocktail party," he told me. He also thought he'd been associated with the **Flash Gordon** page from at least early 1935. Meaning he had a hand in the improved looks of the feature.

SCI FI FUNNIES PART II

DON MOORE

While the pictures grew better and better and the half page stretched to almost a full page, the continuties remained relatively clunky. The late Don Moore was the uncredited author from the start. About thirty at the time, Moore was editor of the adventure fiction pulp **Argosy**. King Features is said to have hired him to script **Flash Gordon** at a salary of $25 a week. At **Argosy** Moore bought stories from such fantasy and science fiction stalwarts as A. Merritt, Otis Adelbert Kline and Edgar Rice Burroughs and their influence is evident. In editing Burroughs, Moore demanded "action...action," and advised him "the more fantastic creatures and imaginative scenes you can pack in...", the better. In his space opera Moore followed his own advice assiduously.

His copy, neatly lettered beneath the pictures by Raymond's uncle, was plummy stuff. As the next couple of samples show —

MING: I see, Barin, that you've defied my orders that no man may let his hair grow!

BARIN: Just because you're bald, is no good reason why we Arborians should go hairless!

AURA: Father, why this sudden desire to see my son? Certainly, your interest is not sentimental!

MING: Sentiment? Bah! I intend to take your son away from all parental care and place him under the supervision of my generals, so that, some day, he may succeed me on the throne of Mongo!

AURA: No...no! Never! Ugh! You're positively inhuman!

It's probable that most of Flash's followers didn't pay much attention to what was being said under the pictures. It was those pictures themselves — vast tableaus of lovely women and heroic men in fantasy palaces, scenes of lush monster-ridden jungles and all that larger-than-life bravura action, all those adolescent dreams of romance and adventure so patiently given life — that seduced the readers. While never as widely publicized as Milton Caniff, Chester Gould and some of the other top grossing comic strip artists, Raymond was one of the most influential. He inspired another whole generation of comic book and comic strip men. Raymond had made attempts to move into magazine illustration, but little came of it. He resigned himself to being a comic strip artist and said, "I decided honestly that comic art work is an art form in itself, it reflects the life and times more accurately and actually is more artistic than magazine illustration."

A SHOWER OF POISONED ARROWS FLIES TOWARD FLASH, AS HE CARRIES THE PRINCESS TO SHELTER.
UNDAUNTED WILY SAGAM SENDS HIS MEN FOR CRUDE OIL TO BURN THE TRAPPED SHIP "POW-ER-RAD WHEN THE BURNING WATER!"
BUT FLASH, HAVING SAVED ADORA FROM THE ARROW POISON, TURNS TO THE SHIPS FIRING PORTS AND TEACHES THE SAVAGES A LESSON BY PICKING OFF THOSE WHO SPRING FROM COVER.
SAYS PAINFULLY BUT FLASH SUCKS HIS LIFE TO SUCK THE POISON FROM HER WOUND "I'LL SAVE YOU," HE MUTTERS
WITH A FURIOUS BURST OF RAY-BOLTS FLASH DRIVES BACK THE MURDEROUS SAVAGES AND CLOSES THE ROCKET'S ESCAPE-HATCH.

ENTER AUSTIN BRIGGS

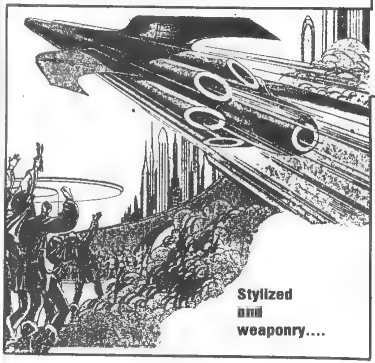
Flash Gordon branched out and added a daily in the spring of 1940. Raymond felt he couldn't handle the extra art chores and his assistant drew the daily adventures. Briggs, who was later to become one of the most successful illustrators and commercial artists in America, was never completely happy in the strip field. His lack of enthusiasm sometimes shows in his work of the early Forties and the dailies have a hurried look, but even halfhearted Briggs was better than what many of his funny paper contemporaries could turn out even when straining. He worked in a looser, more lushly inked version of the style he'd helped Raymond develop. His figure work was always good, utilizing more natural poses and compositions than had graced the Sundays. Had this new daily been a pantomime strip, it might've ranked as one of the better achievements of the genre. Unfortunately Moore's beautifully stilted prose was included.

The initial sequence found Flash and Dale on Mongo being hunted as outlaws by the forces of Ming the Merciless, a price of "a thousand gold mingols" on their heads. The first line Flash speaks sets the style for what is to follow for the next few years.As he pilots a rocketship, one handed, toward a safer patch of territory, he says to Dale, perched on his lap, "Alone at last!" Almost immediately their ship explodes. When Flash promises Dale he'll save her, she replies, "I don't care what happens, if I'm in your arms." Surviving the crash, the couple find themselves in some pretty wild, even for Mongo, country. Flash has barely had time to slaughter and barbecue a procon — a sort of shaggy wild pig — when they are attacked by a "starving horrosaur." Horrosaurs are big dragonlike monsters, surly in their best moments and especially grumpy when famished. Flash, finding his raygun of no use, climbs aboard the creature and drives his sword into his brain. Then, hearing someone approach, Flash exclaims, "Hark!" And so it goes. Even Briggs' excellent, if somewhat slapdash, artwork couldn't keep this daily version going.It succumbed in 1944.

That same year, Alex Raymond entered the Marine Corps, giving up **Flash Gordon** for good and all. The Sunday was taken over by Briggs. He stuck with the page until the middle of 1948, never signing his name to it. "I was ashamed of it," he once told me. The page was well done, though hurried, but the job of depicting the wild doings on Mongo was just not magazine illustration. Wishing to try that fulltime, Briggs, even though King Features offered him a new and better contract to continue, decided to quit. After leaving the syndicate offices on the day he resigned, Briggs wandered around Manhattan feeling sick and uncertain. His subsequent work as an illustrator, together with his participation in the Famous Artists Schooi, made him a millionaire. He died in Paris in 1973.

RABOY TAKES OVER

Flash underwent another transformation in 1948 when Emanuel "Mac" Raboy took over the Sunday. Long an admirer of Raymond's work, Raboy was thirty four and a veteran comic book artist. New York born, he'd graduated out of a comic book sweat shop run by Harry "A" Chesler to become one of the stars of the Fawcett comics line.A meticulous, and slow, worker, Raboy was the first artist on Captain Marvel, Jr. and it was in Bulletman that he designed the quintessential rotten guy villain of World War II — Captain Nazi. He brought the flamboyant, light opera look back to the **Flash** page. His early Sundays abound in

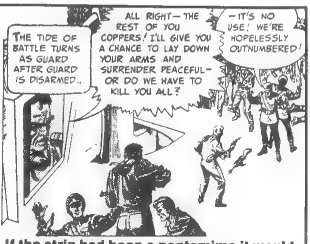


swashbuckling heroes, beautiful maidens, skulking villains and highly stylized rockets and weaponry. On Raboy's Mongo even the lowliest of villains wore glitteringly polished boots.

At long last Don Moore was given a writing credit, but this didn't inspire him to new heights. Dale continued to behave like a petulant high school cheerleader —

Flash decides to head an exploring expedition. "Don't think you're going to have all the fun and leave me behind," Dale teases.

— and Flash kept plodding along in his foursquare, humorless way.


THE TIDE OF BATTLE TURNS AS GUARD AFTER GUARD IS DISARMED..
ALL RIGHT— THE REST OF YOU COPPERS! I'LL GIVE YOU A CHANCE TO LAY DOWN YOUR ARMS AND SURRENDER PEACEFUL— OR DO WE HAVE TO KILL YOU ALL?
—IT'S NO USE! WE'RE HOPELESSLY OUTNUMBERED!

If the strip had been a pantomime it would have rated as one of the best to grace the comics page—ever!

A DIFFERENT FLASH

The daily strip was revived in November of 1951. This, though, was a very different **Flash Gordon.** There was no space opera and no light opera either. The dialogue appeared in balloons and wasn't stilted. The opening story dealt with a prison break on an orbiting jailhouse satellite and all the gadgets and props looked as though they might actually work. There was melodrama, and a bit of hokum, yet the strip had the feel of real, up-to-date science fiction. After a few years some of the old elements started creeping back in. There was a return to Mongo and even encounters with Ming II, who was every bit as nasty as the old man. Even so, the strip remained pretty good for quite a while.

Various writers contributed scripts, among them old pro Harry Harrison. The artwork was originally by Dan Barry. Another graduate of comic books, where he'd drawn Vigilante, Johnny Quick and great quantities of true crime, Barry had earlier appeared on the newspaper comic pages with his unsigned version of the daily **Tarzan.** He had developed and perfected his own, somewhat earthier, version of the Raymond style in the comic books of the Forties. Barry put the style to good use on the **Flash Gordon** strip, but unfortunately took to farming out more and more of the artwork. today he is responsible for both the daily and the Sunday, but the feature has little of its old spark. **CF**

Ron Goulart has authored comic strips, comic books, sf, western and mystery novels and loads of magazine articles. He is a contributing editor of COMICS FEATURE and a prominent popular historian.

LOOKING BACK ON THE GOLDEN AGE

By Ron Goulart

The second Novelty Press title, and the one that was to launch the formidable team of Joe Simon and Jack Kirby, appeared in the spring of 1940. Novelty, as mentioned in our last installment, was the Manhattan branch of the mammoth Curtis Publishing Company. Busy back in Philadelphia turning out mass-circulation slicks like **Ladies' Home Journal** and the **Saturday Evening Post**, Curtis hired Funnies, Inc. to produce the contents of their comic books. Lloyd Jacquet's shop had already created **Target Comics** for them and they now followed it up with **Blue Bolt**, Vol. 1, No. 1 bore a June, 1940 cover date.

Unlike **Target**, wherein the Target didn't appear until several issues had passed, **Blue Bolt**'s star was aboard from the start Back then, when supermen were multiplying like mosquitoes on a woodland pond, quite a few of them came by their powers and abilities accidently. Plastic Man got acid spilled on him, the Human Bomb swallowed an explosive capsule and Billy Batson wandered into an abandoned subway.

In the initial Blue Bolt episode a Harvard football star named Fred Parrish had a series of accidents that would permanently disable your average fellow. First off Fred is seen practicing punt with a couple of his school chums "on a secluded mountain estate." All three of them are struck by a bolt of lightning and when the somewhat stupified Fred tries to fly for help in his airplane, he's struck by another bolt. His plane crashes and while he's still out cold he's carried by a "group of otherworldly looking figures" deep down "into the depths of the Earth." He's deposited in a vast lab that any Universal Pictures mad scientist would envy and a bearded gent who refers to himself as "the great Dr. Bertoff" shoots him full of synthetic lightning bolts. By the time Bertoff christens him Blue Bolt, you feel Fred's certainly earned his name.

AGAINST THE SORCERESS

The good doctor has more than humanitarian motives for saving Fred's life and converting him into a blueclad hero type. "You shall lead my legions against those of the Green Sorceress," Dr. Be explains while the Bolt is still a touch groggy. A sort of emerald-tinted Dragon Lady, the Green Sorceress "is descended from a long line of those who practice black magic such as the world would never believe possible." She's out to grab this hidden empire's radium deposits and use them to "enslave the world."

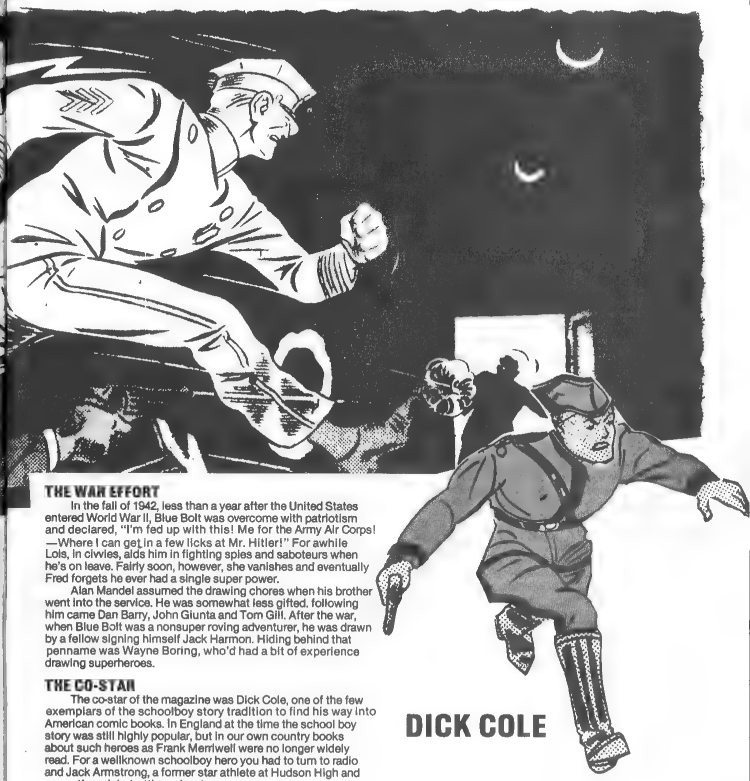
For the next several issues Blue Bolt's work is pretty much cut out for him. In a series of impressive, zap-filled encounters that rival those of Flash Gordon and a half-dozen SF pulp heroes combined, he battles the green-garbed minions of the Sorceress. But destroying the evil lady herself proves to be tougher than he anticipated, particularly since he finds himself developing a crush on her. And she in unguarded moments, laments, "Oh, why do I love one whom I must destroy that my empire's destiny may be fullfilled!" Finally, in Vol. 1, No. 10, the conflict is resolved. Blue Bolt saves the Sorceress' life and she offers to grant him "any wish you desire." Apparently forgetting his onetime yen for her, he opts for a political favor. He requests her to give up "your quest for world domination." She agrees.

SIMON & KIRBY

What really made the strip worth following was not its melodramatic mythical kingdom continuities, but the artwork. Blue Bolt was the first feature on which Simon and Kirby worked together. Simon created the character and drew the original adventure unaided. Kirby came along with the second and pencilled throughout the Green Sorceress saga. Even then his work was energetic, hyperactive and unlike anything else in comics.

Simon was working as an editor for the Fox line when he first met Kirby. He was also freelancing for Funnies, Inc. and invited Kirby to start working on the Blue Bolt strip he was doing for the shop. "I rented a little office on 45th Street," he recalls. "Kirby and I would go there after work at Fox and during lunch hours, where we'd do our freelance work." He's described their working methods thusly—"I'd letter the stuff and Jack would complete the pencils. Then I would ink it. If we were in a jam, Jack would pitch in with his shading." He describes the Blue Bolt material as "pure Simon and Kirby," unsullied by the hands of any assistants.

When the team went on to other publishers and higher page rates, Blue Bolt was taken over by George Mandel. Another member of Funnies, Inc., Mandel's style was closer to that being used by such newspaper strip men as Milton Caniff and Alfred Andriola. The feature became slicker, less flamboyant. During Mandel's tenure the Bolt returned topside, took to calling himself the American and picked up a pretty lady super sidekick named Lois.



THE WAR EFFORT

In the fall of 1942, less than a year after the United States entered World War II, Blue Bolt was overcome with patriotism and declared, "I'm fed up with this! Me for the Army Air Corps! —Where I can get in a few licks at Mr. Hitler!" For awhile Lois, in civies, aids him in fighting spies and saboteurs when he's on leave. Fairly soon, however, she vanishes and eventually Fred forgets he ever had a single super power.

Alan Mandel assumed the drawing chores when his brother went into the service. He was somewhat less gifted, following him came Dan Barry, John Giunta and Tom Gill. After the war, when Blue Bolt was a nonsuper roving adventurer, he was drawn by a fellow signing himself Jack Harmon. Hiding behind that penname was Wayne Boring, who'd had a bit of experience drawing superheroes.

THE CO-STAR

The co-star of the magazine was Dick Cole, one of the few exemplars of the schoolboy story tradition to find his way into American comic books. In England at the time the school boy story was still highly popular, but in our own country books about such heroes as Frank Merriwell were no longer widely read. For a wellknown schoolboy hero you had to turn to radio and Jack Armstrong, a former star athlete at Hudson High and currently a globetrotting adventurer.

DICK COLE

Dick Cole attended prestigious Farr Military Academy, after a childhood spent being a scientifically nurtured wonder boy. It all began when a waif in a basket "was left upon the doorstep of one Prof. Hiram Blair—a scientist with a secret formula for raising a superlative type of child. . . This foundling boy was known as Dick Cole." The kindly professor raised Dick, using "rare treatments, which included everything from special vitamin serums to violet and gamma ray baths." All this, plus several extended jaunts around the world, turned blond Dick into a lad whose "mental and physical development was geared up to an amazing degree."

Dick remained a modest and self-effacing young man, despite his obvious superiority to just about everyone in the world. When not excelling academically, athletically and militarily at Farr, the wonder boy was performing daring deeds out in the civilian world. He won the Carnegie Medal for Bravery, accomplished amazing things as a Hollywood stuntman, subdued a horde of escaped convicts and saved a beautiful European princess from being kidnapped on the high seas.

The Dick Cole strip was written and drawn by Bob Davis. Davis died young and his entire comic book career lasted roughly three years. His style was cartoony, diagramatic and full of action. His characters are forever running, jumping and exchanging punches, and a typical Davis page resembles a storyboard for a Saturday matinee serial. As a writer, Davis went in for pulp plots, full of violence and intrigue with a few boys' book trappings like buried treasure thrown in.

In the June, 1941 issue Davis came up with one of his more inspired notions. The **Blue Bolt** cover, drawn by Bill Everett, showed Dick tangling with a blond lout in the familiar green Farr uniform. "Dick Cole *battles* his double!" proclaims a headline. Inside Davis told us that, while kindly Prof. Blair had been rearing his wonder boy, in Vienna "a quack, calling himself Herr Doktor Karno, had the self-same thought!!!" To make sure *his* wonder boy turned out nasty, Karno got a hold of of an orphan, both of whose parents were convicted murderers.

As the boy, Simba Karno, grew to manhood, he, quite naturally, developed feelings of jealousy over the continuing good press his rival was getting. When he finally reaches America and enrolls at Farr, an explosive confrontation takes place. It lasts for several issues, until Simba realizes the error of his ways and, with the help of a bit of brain surgery, becomes a good guy and Dick's staunch pal.

The feature toned down after that. The succession of increasingly duller artists who took over after Davis' accidental death in an auto accident didn't help much. Even so, Dick managed to hold on until 1949

SECOND STRING

Whereas its sister magazine had gotten under way with just one superhero—the android White Streak—on the staff, **Blue Bolt** was crowded with wild-talented characters. For good measure they also had a super horse, a super train and a super submarine. Sub-Zero Man was a visitor from another world. While his superatom ship is carrying him from Venus to Earth, it gets frozen by an asteroid. Crash landing near Salt Lake City, Utah, he finds he's turned to ice. Fortunately he was able to shoot himself in the head with his atom pistol and thaw out temporarily from time to time. Suspect and hounded at first, Sub-Zero was gradually accepted by America. Getting his impressive freezing powers under control, he became a crime fighter. When it came time to pick a boy companion, he chose an Eskimo. The earliest artist was Larry Antonetee, one of the great primitives of the Golden Age.

Bill Everett took over for one icy adventure and eventually John Daly, who later put in a stint over at DC with Aquaman, drew the feature.

More supernatural than superheroic was Sergeant Spook. A ghostly policeman, he was drawn initially by Malcolm Kildale. His name before he blows himself up in a police laboratory accident actually was Spook, indicating he was destined for spectral work. In his ghostly form he still wears his cop uniform, although no one but us can see him. Like the unseen ghosts in movies like **Topper**, the sergeant can pick up objects in the real

**UNLIKE THE CA
NOVELTY TITL
WAS ALWAYS T
OWN**

world and he can communicate with the living at times. For awhile he resides in Ghost Town. He becomes chummy with a pipesmoking British 'tec called Dr. Sherlock and aides him in bringing such villains as the ghost of Jesse James to justice Later on he moved into our world, got a boy sidekick, and concentrated on more mundane crimes. The artwork improved greatly when John Jordan worked on the strip. An occasional script was by none other than Mickey Spillane.

For railroad buffs there was Runaway Ronson by Paul Gustavson. Runaway was "stream-engineer" by profession and piloted a super-streamlined train. One that was continually beset by mysterious gangs and other crooks and criminals. A cowboy who wore not only a white hat, but a white shirt, white neckerchief, white jeans, white boots and white holster was, naturally enough, the White Rider. He shared billing with his white steed, an "amazing animal of might and intelligence." **The Phantom Sub** dealt with three adventurers who roamed the undersea world in a special submarine of their own invention. Credited to FOS, the feature was the joint effort of Ben Flinton, Bill O'Conner and Leonard Sansone. The first two went on to create the original Atom at DC and Sansone gained international fame during World War II for his GI cartoons about a horny soldier known as the Wolf.

SE WITH OTHER ES, BLUE BOLT HE STAR OF HIS BOOK.

Funnies, Inc. had, by the way, scored a hit with the Sub-Mariner over at Marvel. Possibly hoping for some of his luck to rub off, they used the word Sub in the name of not one but two of the new features they provided for **Blue Bolt.**

After a year Runaway Ronson was given his walking papers and replaced by yet another superhero. In Vol. 2, No. 1 (June, 1941) a mysterious tornado plays a brief part in the adventures of Dick Cole, Sub-Zero and Blue Bolt. Then, in the last pages of the book appears as the Twister—"Have you been wondering who the strange character was that appeared mysteriously in other stories in this book? If so—here is your answer!" The Twister wore a colorful costume of crimson, black and yellow with candy-striped tights. When he got to spinning around, he looked something like a barber pole.

He explained, in the next issue, how he got to be the way he was. "I was picked up by the whirling twister. I never found out what really happened, but a strange feeling came over me. . . and as I collected my senses, I found myself a strange being. . . part of the cyclone itself. . . and able to control it at will." Gustavson drew the first two whirlwind adventures, then Mike Roy took over. The Twister ran out of wind after seven appearances.

The magazine managed to fit several other strips into its sixty-four pages. Jack Warren, whose cartoon style was considerably more amusing than his copy, chronicled the adventures of a disreputable pair named Krisko and Jasper. **Old Cap Hawkin's Tales** was an educational thing that gave the true stories behind famous American sayings—"The tree of liberty must, from time to time, be watered by the blood of patriots and tyrants," "Don't give up the ship," etc. There was also a boy inventor in the person of Edison Bell. With him you got not only a story each month but plans for making everything from a "life size model of the S.S. Southern Wind" to "a real honest-to-goodness remote control robot."

As **Blue Bolt** grew older, it grew more conservative. All its superheroes departed, a kid gang known as Fearless Fellers (one of whom was a girl named Butch) was added. The title was sold to L.B. Cole's Star line in 1949 and ended its days as **Blue Bolt Weird Tales.** CF

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SILVER AGE

BY WILL MURRAY

A DC editor I won't name once told me a wonderful anecdote.It goes like this: During the early Sixties, the collective editorship at DC Comics noticed the proliferation of Stan Lee's upstart Marvel Comics. Seeing the wild, exaggerated artwork of Jack Kirby, they pronouced the whole line unforgivably bad. But Marvel was selling. They decided bad art must sell comics, so they told their artists to start drawing as badly as possible. Thus, DC's infamous Go-Go checks, **Brother Power the Geek** and other memorable DC disasters.

I don't know if other comic book companies had the same experience, but it's the only way I know to explain Dell's dreadful line of superheroes.

Dell Comics was a maverick publisher. They didn't subscribe to the Comics Code, but because they published tv and movie tie-ins, funny animals and similar "safe" titles, parents never got upset with them.One of the Dell strategies was to avoid superheroes. Prior to 1965, their only excursion into that field was the intelligent,if restrained, **Brain Boy.**

Briefly, Brain Boy was a teenage telepath named Matt Price, whose powers of mind-reading and levitation were at the disposal of a U.S. government agency. He wore no costume, possessed limited powers but excellent scripts, and art by Frank Springer. For most of his six issue run, he grappled with the arch-tyrant, Ricorta.

Dell never once called Brain Boy a superhero, but clearly that was the market they were attempting to penetrate.

But two years later, superheroes were once again a force in the industry. Marvel,DC, ACG, Charlton,Archie — everyone was introducing superheroes. Into the cauldron of creativity Dell introduced their first unequivocal superhero title, **Nukla.**

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NUKLA
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HOW DID HE COME TO BE.... AND HOW WILL HIS POWERS HELP HIM AGAINST
THE EVILEST MAN IN THE WORLD?

FIRST TRY

Nukla wasn't bad. Just unoriginal. The product of an uncredited scripter and a competent if unmemorable artist named Sal Trapini, it premiered with a October-December, 1965 cover date, bearing the bold coverline, "The first action-packed adventure of the greatest SUPER-HERO on Earth!"

Not quite. Nukla was another Dell espionage character. He was really Matthew Gibbs, America's top U-2 pilot. The U-2 was a top secret high altitude reconaissance aircraft used to fly over Soviet installations in the days before spy satellites.In 1960, the Russians shot down a U-2 and captured its pilot, Francis Gary Powers, in an extremely embarrassing Cold War incident.

Nukla's origin was obviously inspired by the Powers incident. While spying over Red China, Gibbs and his U-2 are obliterated by a salvo of nuclear missiles. Instead of dying, his disassociated atoms reintegrated, and with them, his U-2. In quick order, he discovers that he can project atomic blasts from his fingertips, turn invisible and immaterial and fly — with or without his plane. In short, Gibbs became master of a nice bag of superheroic tricks.

Matthew Gibbs, renamed Nukla by the C.I.A., is returned to work patrolling the atmosphere in his now-nuclear U-2.

He spent most of the first issue nuking Communist nuclear installations. Nice work if you can get it.

Instead of a costume, Nukla wore a red-and-white flight suit with aviator's goggles attached to a red communications headpiece. If it all sounds familiar, the whole schtick is a minor variation on Charlton's Captain Adam, an astronaut atomized in a missile launch and reintegrated as the nuclear-charged Captain Atom. Captain Atom was created in 1960, and vanished in 1961, so Dell must have thought that by 1965, no one would remember his origin. Except that in June, Charlton revived the character in **Strange Suspense Stories**. Someone at Dell must have been very embarrassed.

Nukla wasn't bad. All it lacked was the distinctive art style of Steve Ditko, which had made Captain Atom so visually appealing. After three undistinguished issues, Dell alleviated that omission and Ditko, inked by Sal Trapini, collaborated on the fourth issue, an amusing battle over an enemy nuclear war base on the moon.

As it happened, the fourth issue was the last of **Nukla**. That's just as many issues as you can squeeze out before sales figures on number 1 come in.They must have been disappointing.

ALL THE REST

As it turned out, this would be the pattern with the rest of Dell's superhero line.And there was quite a pile of them, starting with **Frankenstein**, dated September, 1966. **Dracula** followed in November,and **Werewolf** straggled along in December. With the exception of **Werewolf**, none of the "origin issues" were first issues.

The explanation is simple. In the early Sixties, Dell published adaptations of such then-contemporary films as *Cheyenne Autumn* and *Dr. Who and the Daleks*, in their Movie Classics series. They adapted several classic Universal monster films, among them *Frankenstein*, *Dracula*, *The Wolfman* and *The Mummy*. These were hardly of Classics Illustrated quality, but they were well done for their time. It's hard to believe they could spawn such dreck.

I can only imagine the scene at the Dell editorial offices. **Brain Boy** didn't sell. **Nukla**, a real superhero for gosh sakes, didn't sell. What sells? If they looked at Marvel Comics and noticed Jack Kirby's outrageous art, they might have decided that a similar style was what they should emulate. If they noticed Kirby's **Hulk**, they might have concluded that monsters sold. But the great monster comics fad of the Fifties was well over by this time.

"What can we do that these other guys can't" might have been the question. Well, we could do the stuff Code-approved comics can't do — vampires, zombies, stuff like that. Nah, parents groups would be all over us.

"I know!" a lone voice might have cried. "Let's turn them all into...superheroes!"

...FRANKENSTEIN...

It might have seemed like a crazy enough idea to work. In fact, it had been done before. Back in the Forties, Prize Comics had a very successful **Frankenstein** comic based on the seriocomic adventures of the Frankenstein monster. It lasted nearly ten years, and is still remembered with fondness by some—mostly for the Dick Briefer art.

Dell's **Frankenstein** used the famous Mary Shelly novel as its launching point. Only the monster wasn't lost amid the ice floes. Instead, he had lain forgotten in Castle Frankenstein until a lucky lightning bolt struck the inanimate corpse, restoring it to life.

Frankenstein, who for some reason wears a red skintight suit with a blue F emblazoned on his belt buckle, and has flesh-color skin despite his ugly green face, dons a human-looking mask to hide his true identity and takes the not-very-clever civilian name of Frank N. Stone. Despite his monster background, he dedicates his life to fighting injustice. Along the way, he befriends the wealthy Mr.Knickerbocker, saves his life and when Knickerbocker dies of old age, Frank N. Stone inherits his vast wealth — not to mention a posh pad and a dour butler named William.Not bad for a sleepy monster. Frankenstein's main villain was a bald midget known as Mr. Freek.

Sounds pretty bad, right? You'd have to see it to believe it.The art was the work of a forgotten artist named Tony Tallarico. I don't know his background. He pulled a stint as the artist behind Charlton's super-powered version of the Blue Beetle. In later years he was reduced to drawing — if that's the word — coloring books. His style was crude and cartoony. It's hard to believe that Dell could believe his work possessed sales appeal enough to risk thousands of dollars publishing a comic. But, wonder of wonders, Tallarico didn't just draw **Frankenstein**, but **Dracula** and **Werewolf** too! Maybe he was somebody's relative.

...DRACULA...

Dracula's origin also begins in a castle, Castle Dracula. There, a descendent of the original Dracula, a scientist, is feverishly at work on an experiment that will remove the false stain of vampirism from the family name. He succeeds in creating a serum derived from bats that will heal brain damage. But when Dracula releases his guinea bats, one of them knocks the serum into a glass of mineral water. Dracula accidentally drinks the concoction and is transformed into ... a bat.

So much for clearing the family name.

Dracula is pondering his fate, Marvel style, when the sinister Boris Eval takes over Castle Dracula. Eval is a Balkan madman who has his own army and several nuclear missiles. Castle Dracula is to be his staging area. For what isn't clear.

Dracula makes short work of Eval, however —which isn't bad for a guy whose only power is to change into a winged mouse. Sure, he can fly and possesses radar sense, but as he himself wryly observes, "A small boy with a BB gun can be as deadly to me as all of Eval's rockets."

So Dracula embarks on a muscle-building program, gets himself a garish purple-and-orange costume and becomes...a muscle-bound guy who can turn into a winged mouse. It's not much of an improvement, believe me.

In subsequent issues, Dracula sets up shop in America, taking the name of Aloysius Ulysses Card. His friends call him Al U. Card, an anagram of Dracula. (One has the impression that these stories might have been written by Forrest J. Ackerman, who delights in such atrocious puns!)

In his second adventure, Dracula tangles with one Admiral Maltemps, whose fleet of weather-controlling dirigibles just happens to attack the ocean liner on which Dracula is coming to America. On shipboard, he meets the beautiful blonde B.B. Beebe, who will become his girlfriend of sorts. Funny thing about B.B. She looks *exactly* like Ann Thrope, the blond who chases Frank N. Stone around, trying to trick him into revealing himself as Frankenstein. Apparently the script writer seemed to think Ann's martial status was important because he constantly refers to her as Miss Ann Thrope (misanthrope?).

In the fourth issue, B.B. drinks some of Dracula's serum and is transformed into the blue-costumed Fleeta. She managed to enjoy one adventure before the comic was cancelled.

...WEREWOLF...

The third member of this illustrious trio of superheroes, Werewolf, might just have been the worst. Air Force Major Wiley Wolf crashlands in Alaska and is rescued by Wolves. Subsisting on food scavenged by his wolf friends, Major Wolf is eventually rescued. He takes one wolf, Thor, home as a pet.

Back in America, Wolf encounters a beautiful blonde (imagine that!) named Judy, who informs him that his rescue must never be revealed. From now on, Wiley Wolf will be Werewolf, the Man Who No Longer Exists, a secret agent for the C.I.A. They retrain him, give him a yucky black fighting suit and sic him and Thor on Fidel Castro, who is sneaking new missiles into Cuba.

In costume, Werewolf looks like a messy inkblot. His suit covers his entire body, much like Spider-Man's new costume.However, Werewolf's garb has no distinguishing features — no insignia, eyeholes, nothing. It enables him to breathe underwater indefinitely, but in action, he's just an ugly black blob. It has my nomination for the worst comics costume of all time.

Werewolf does have one interesting — if implausible — power. The C.I.A. hypnotized him into being able to mold his facial characteristics, merely by willing it, into the likeness of anyone he's ever met. I told you it was implausible.

Werewolf was so bad it lasted only three issues instead of Dell's usual four. But that's a better record than **Neutro**, Dell's January, 1967 entry into the superhero lists.

The Werewolf looked like a messy inkblot in action!

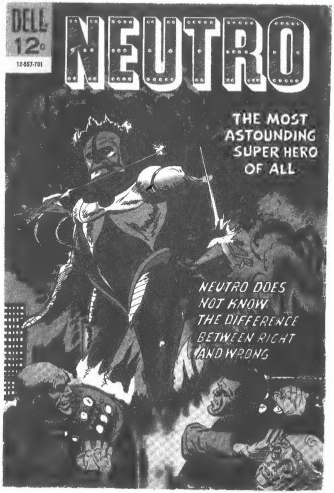
...AND A ROBOT

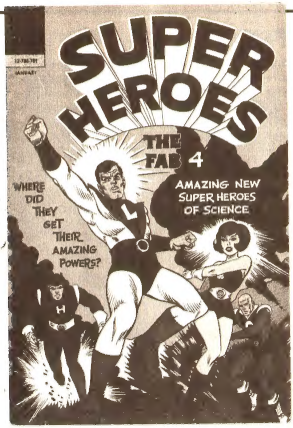
Neutro was a fifteen foot tall blue-and-red robot. Discovered by scientist John Dodge and his assistant Doc Banyan in an Indian burial ground where centuries ago, spacemen had buried him, the robot is reassembled and named Neutro.

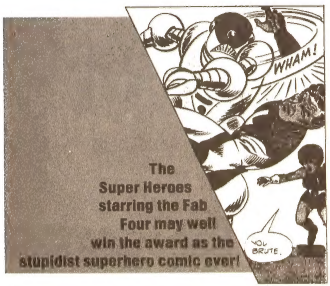
Dodge and Banyan spend most of the issue fantasizing about Neutro's immense destructive power while the mindless robot stands idle. By the time they get up the nerve to activate him, the evil scientists of Group 777 send Neutro a counter signal. Neutro flies to their side, and the world trembles in fear of Neutro's next move.

That's the whole issue — honest! It was drawn by Jack Sparling, a former newspaper comic strip artist who toiled in comics when he had a spare moment. His art isn't as unattractive as Tony Tallarico's but it's pretty trepid stuff — despite being done in a Kirbyesque style.

There was never a second issue of **Neutro**. Someone obviously came to his senses in an awful hurry.







You could call **Super Heroes** a **Fantastic Four** ripoff if it wasn't so inept. Four teenagers, Don Boyd, Polly Wheeler, Reb and Hy, are visiting Dell's Hall of Heroes (where Nukla and other defunct characters are on display), when they happen upon four unfamiliar costumed androids.

While they are pondering this mystery, the evil Dr. Luuki is trying to bring his destructive robot, Enndo-Man, to life. Why? To "terminate humanity's reign on Earth," Luuki says. And what could have embittered this brilliant scientist so badly? He was "ejected from the group which created the Fab 5 in the Dell Hall of Heroes," that's why!

His motivation made crystal clear, Dr. Luuki activates Enndo-Man, but there's an accident. Not only is the robot brought to life, but the minds of the four teenagers are transferred into the empty skulls of the Fab 4 androids. They become El, the Laser-eyed leader, Pollymer Polly, who possesses superspeed, Hy, a hypersonic android, and the Cryogenic Crispy, whose powers are similar to Iceman's.

Their costumes are as bad as their names. Trust me.

It took the Fab 4 — who seemed to be a combination of the Metal Men and the Fantastic Four with a little of Noman thrown in — the whole issue to vanquish Enndo-Man. The details are too pitiful to repeat here. In their second issue, they fought an evil clown, another clunky robot and several other minor villains in three short stories. The coverline read: "America's Greatest Super Heroes Battle the Clown...Mr. Nutt...and Johnny Boom-Boom." Sounds like using an atom smasher to shell peanuts.But if you really want the truth, the Fab 4 weren't the world's greatest super heroes. They weren't even close.

But 4 was their magic number, I have to admit. Because that's exactly as long as **Super Heroes** ran.

And that was the end of Dell's foray into the superhero field. As a group, these must be the worst superhero titles of the otherwise-exciting Sixties. They were so weak, so ill-conceived, that nobody seems to have ever noticed that they were done in flagrant imitation of Marvel Comics. Each character possessed a grim secret, soap-opera longings and flamboyant anatomies. There was even a Marvel-style Frankenstein crossover in **Dracula 4**.

The funny thing about all is that, only a few years later, the Comics Code was relaxed and another company seemingly copied Dell's monsters-tunrned-superheroes idea. While the Marvel Comics versions of **Frankenstein**, **Dracula** and **Werewolf by Night** weren't all unqualified successes, they weren't the unmitigated failures that Dell had produced. They respected the reader's intelligence.

There's a lesson in there somewhere.

CF

ONE LAST TRY

But Dell wasn't beaten yet. That same month, they really bit the bullet. They released a magazine called **Super Heroes**, drawn by Sal Trapini, and featuring the Fab 4.

Will Murray is the author of Duende: The History of The Shadow, ghost writes a popular men's adventure series and scripts the Doc Savage radio show for National Public Radio.

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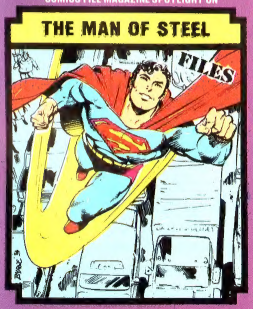

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